OLD!

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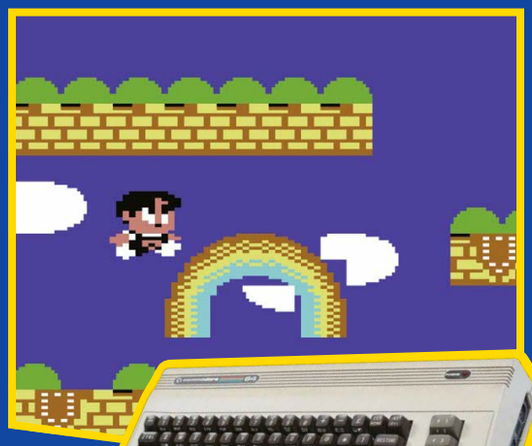
ULTIMATE GUIDE: SUPER MARIO LAND 2
THE WONDERFULLY WEIRD GAME BOY SEQUEL THAT INTRODUCED WARIO

THE EVOLUTION OF YAKUZA
SEGA ON ITS HARD-HITTING ACTION SERIES



THE LEGACY OF THE COMMODORE 64!

VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY VETERANS WEIGH UP THE ICONIC COMPUTER'S ELEPHANTINE IMPACT

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WE REVISIT THE MANY TITLES OF THE ACCLAIMED STUDIO

SWORDS & SORCERY
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HOW CREATIVES SET UP GAME PUBLISHERS IN THE EIGHTIES

THE MAKING OF PUSH-OVER
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE COMMODORE 64 GAME?

DARRAN JONES

I'm going to go with *Bubble Bobble* as it genuinely felt in a different league to the version I owned at home on my Amstrad.
Expertise: Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing:
Still Wakes The Deep
Favourite game of all time:
Strider

TIM EMPEY

I have many fond memories of playing *Kikstart 2* with my brother. I once made a course that was all just springs. It was very silly.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go.
Currently playing:
Final Fantasy VII Rebirth (demo)
Favourite game of all time:
God Hand

ANDY SALTER

Bubble Bobble is the only game I remember playing on the C64 so it wins by default.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding:
RTR: Imperium Surrectum
Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

MARTYN CARROLL

IK+, Archer Maclean's fighting masterclass. This was always my go-to when visiting C64-owning mates.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Pragmata*
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

RORY MILNE

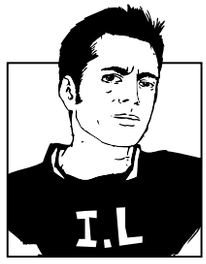
I have many, but I keep coming back to *Paradroid*. There's just so much going on, from the epic exploration and top-down line-of-sight shooting to the pitch perfect transfer sub-game.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing:
Donkey Kong 64
Favourite game of all time:
Tempest

ANDREW FISHER

Wizball is Sensible Software at its best, colouring in the world with demanding shoot-'em-up action. Sheer class.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing:
Return To Blacktooth
Favourite game of all time:
Wizball

PAUL ROSE

Mercenary. Wasn't easy, wasn't perfect, but it was 3D in an era when that was rare.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing:
Baldur's Gate III (still!)
Favourite game of all time:
Half-Life 2



IAIN LEE

I think *IO* is an absolute masterpiece.
Expertise: Buying expensive stuff on eBay then never touching it
Currently playing:
Super Meat Boy and SSX Tricky
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC Model B)

LOADING...

I never owned a Commodore 64 growing up, but I was certainly aware of the popular home computer. Although it wasn't quite as popular as the Spectrum in my part of the UK I knew at least three friends who owned one and I would regularly visit their houses to play the many great games I was missing out on like *Bubble Bobble*, *Impossible Mission*, *Armalyte* and *The Last Ninja*.

Like the Spectrum, the C64 proved to be an important micro for a great many people and publishers, with the likes of Electronic Arts, Epyx, Codemasters and Activision all finding huge success on the system. Powered by the VIC-II and SID chips, its importance and presence can still be felt today, and many modern iterations of the system are now available (with a couple more featured within our news section this month).

Martyn Carroll puts his love for the Speccy aside to chew the fat with a number of gaming legends who all found success with Commodore's micro and you'll be able to read all about it on page 22.

Elsewhere within this issue you'll find pieces on *Swords & Sorcery*, *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins* and id Software, as well as an excellent piece on *Yakuza*, which is the very last thing that Nick worked on. He greatly loved Sega's series and was planning to write it himself, hence why he's credited within Abbie Stone's excellent article.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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Yoshi and the Mysterious Book

DISCOVER

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NINTENDO SWITCH 2

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THE **POWER** TO PLAY **ANYWHERE**

Nintendo

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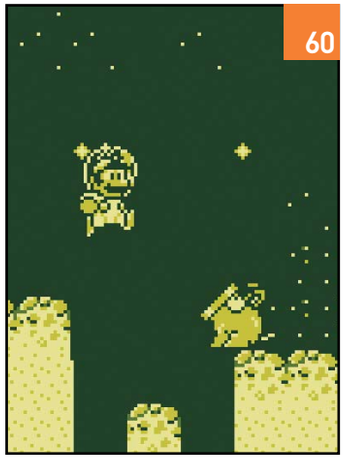
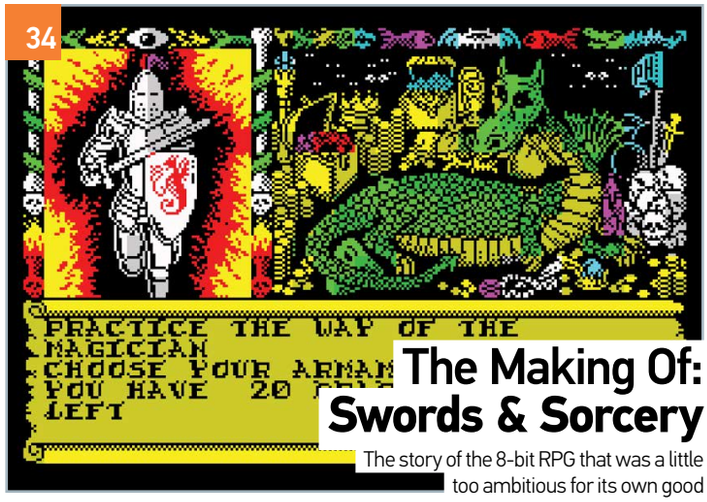


The Legacy Of The Commodore 64
Veteran members of the games industry explain why Commodore's 8-bit home computer left such a lasting impact on those that experienced it



The Making Of: Swords & Sorcery
The story of the 8-bit RPG that was a little too ambitious for its own good

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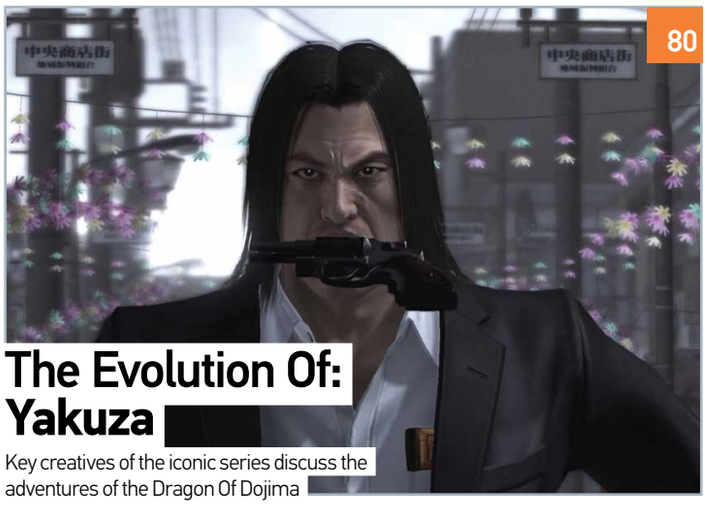

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» These two authentic-looking handhelds will be available in the autumn, from Blaze Entertainment and Retro Games Ltd.

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We went back to the Eighties before, and now we're back, *back* to the Eighties. Again. Great Scott!

CLASSIC MICROS IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

Pocket-sized versions of the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 are coming

Words by Martyn Carroll

With so many retro-gaming devices released these days, it's fair to say we're rarely surprised by new announcements here at Retro Gamer. But we have to admit, we did a comedic double take when it was announced at the end of April that Blaze Entertainment and Retro Games Ltd were teaming up to release portable recreations of the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64. Questions immediately sprung to mind and thankfully one of them wasn't 'why?'.

Before we put those questions to Blaze CEO Andrew Byatt, let's take a closer look at these two devices. At a glance, The Spectrum Handheld and THEC64 Handheld both resemble a Nintendo DSi XL, with a similar form factor and 4.3-inch screen. There's just a single screen of course, with the main console body featuring a d-pad and a bunch of buttons. The colour schemes generate instant nostalgia: The Spectrum is Sinclair black with the rainbow stripe, while THEC64 is beautifully beige. They measure 5.4-inch x 3.4-inch, and are an inch thick so they'll slip comfortably into a pocket without you having to wear clown trousers.

» Blaze CEO Andrew Byatt. Blaze is releasing the devices under its Hyper Mega Tech! brand.

So how did this collaboration come about and what was the aim? "We've been thinking for a while about how to recreate these iconic home computers as handhelds that feel like they have time-travelled from the Eighties into today," says Andrew. "We had been discussing the idea with RGL for a number of years as a, 'Wouldn't it be cool if…' type project. Over time, those conversations evolved into a serious collaboration focussed on capturing the spirit and design of these home computers – as well as creating something fun and unique that looks and feels like you'd imagine they would have done at the time."

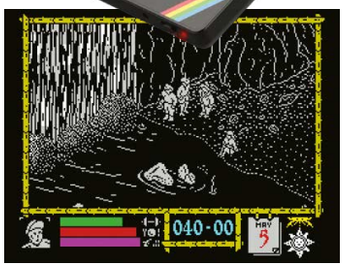
Each device comes preloaded with 25 games and only the fussiest fan could criticise the selection. On The Spectrum you'll find genuine classics like *Manic Miner*, *Skool Daze*, *Starquake* and *Where Time Stood Still*. Meanwhile, THEC64 features mainstays such as *Paradroid*, *Boulder Dash* and *Nebulus*, plus a good selection of newer titles. "You want to include some great titles so people can get straight in," says Andrew, when we ask about the importance of including built-in games. "People want to play. They just want to play a game as quickly as possible with little to no fuss. We feel we've got an awesome line-up of games across the two systems that showcase a range of styles that both home computers were famous for, and that play intuitively with the control scheme we have."

» [C64] THEC64 Handheld features *Lee*, the brilliant arcade adventure where a martial artist goes in search of his forename.

» [ZX Spectrum] Spectrum scamps can get up to their old tricks in *Skool Daze*, which is included.

» Adding the C64's function keys as extra buttons is a neat touch

» It may resemble the original rubber-keyed Spectrum, but the device supports all Spectrum models.



» [ZX Spectrum] Some Spectrum 128K-only games come preloaded, including the epic *Where Time Stood Still*.

What the devices don't have is a keyboard. You can (and indeed are encouraged to) add your own software via the SD card slot, but so many computer games require the use of multiple keys. How has this issue been approached (or rather, how are you supposed to play *Elite* and *The Lords Of Midnight* on these things)? "A full keyboard on something this size would have been very fiddly. We wanted to do something that allows for multiple people to play, and a d-pad and face buttons are arguably the standard for many things," says Andrew. "Every built-in game is pre-mapped to work perfectly with them, and the UI is very similar to Blaze products, so full control lists are easily visible on the screen if you need a quick reference. Everyone can set their own custom mapping as well – and they can use a keyboard or joystick via the rear USB port, so there's plenty of scope for expandability."

> "We feel we've got an awesome line-up of games across the two systems"
>
> ANDREW BYATT

The online reaction to the devices has generally been very positive. This has no doubt been helped by the price – £109.99 for the standard model (a £129.99 Collector's Edition with a carry case and special copy of *Crash/Zzap!64* is also available – or rather was, as it was limited to 2,000 units each and both have completely sold out). Even so, there will always be those dissenting voices, pointing out that you can already play Spectrum and C64 games on this or that device, so why bother? "There are always going to be ways to play, but we aimed to create a fun and visually enjoyable way to play that's sympathetic to the original computers," counters Andrew. "The experience of nostalgia is not just the game, but also how you play, and having the look and feel of THEC64 and The Spectrum in your hands really adds to that experience, compared to other retro handheld devices, which let's be honest, are more designed to play console games. There's also the work that's gone into the experience on the screen. Making sure the gaming experience is on point, that our UI functions allow for the ease of use that other non-official devices struggle with, and that you spend more time playing the games than you do mucking around with settings."

The two devices will be available at Amazon, Funstock and multiple Evercade retailers across Europe and the US. They are due out in October 2026 with preorders now being taken. *

SEGA STILL ON TRACK

In its recent results presentation, Sega Sammy has confirmed that the updates of its legacy IP it announced previously are still incoming. The group confirmed that a so-called 'Super Game' had been canned, but the revivals of *Golden Axe, Streets Of Rage, Crazy Taxi* and *Jet Set Radio* remain part of its upcoming plans. In addition, there's also a 'New *Virtua Fighter* Project' to look forward to. Sadly, there's no definite dates attached to any of these titles yet.

SHARKS FLY WEST

Retro publisher Clear River Games, which we featured in Retro Radar recently, has announced that it's bringing the second volume of M2's *Toaplan Arcade Games* to the West. This Switch and PlayStation 4 collection features the legendary coin-op *Flying Shark* and its lesser-known co-op sequel *Fire Shark*, along with a generous number of home conversions (on the physical release at least; these will be available as DLC if you buy it digitally). It's out 29 August.

Who is Mike Mika?
Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

Halcyon, interrupted

If you're reading this magazine, you've had the dream: you stumble onto a forgotten stash of retro-gaming treasures priced like junk, or left out by the curb. You hit the geek jackpot.

For me, it was a Craigslist post: "Late '80s computer store. Untouched since closure. First come, first serve. Take everything. We need to clear it out!" No photos, just an address and a time.

So we went. Four of us from the office. When we arrived, there were already a few people outside, hovering, pretending not to care (while absolutely caring). The windows were boarded up and the place looked pretty sketchy. The back door we were told to go to stayed shut past the posted time and there was a quiet tension in the air.

Then it opened. Inside: wall-to-wall 8-bit computing nirvana. Rows of C64s, VIC-20s, even a 128D. Shelves of hardware, parts, peripherals. And on the wall, impossibly large, an official Commodore sign straight out of the Eighties. We stepped in slowly. Reverently. That was the mistake.

Because while we stood there, treating it like a museum tour, other people didn't. They moved fast. Hands reaching. Bodies pushing past us. Already carrying things out. Anything not bolted down was gone. And just like that, something primal activated within me.

> "You couldn't savour the moment because the moment was actively disappearing"

I grabbed parts without thinking. A jar of MOS Technology SID chips, the legendary sound chip, like I'd found pirate's gold. Boxed VIC-20 and C64 motherboards. I barely registered that this used to be a repair shop interrupted in time. As if someone had stepped out for lunch and never returned.

I grabbed a few Commodore PETs and ran them out to the car. Back and forth, over and over. There was no time to absorb it, no time to feel anything about it. You couldn't savour the moment because the moment was actively disappearing.

I saw people leaving with boxes of software. Software?! There was a whole other side to the store! More people were arriving from outside. The chatter and sound of footsteps grew in intensity. The pushing and shoving became borderline dangerous.

By the time I got to the software shelves they had already been picked over, stripped with alarming efficiency. I made a decision to push to the back and it paid off. There I found pieces left behind: sealed Infocom games, Datasoft, Epyx. Thirty-year-old new things, resting until this exact moment. I looked around me while holding my box of loot. People were already dispersing, leaving empty shelves and torn posters on the ground that moments before hung unscathed on the walls. That's when it started to feel wrong.

People took everything. Manuals. Cables. Magazines. Pens. Signs. Anything with a logo or a whiff of value. The more common things? Destroyed or tossed to the ground in the stampede. The time capsule was destroyed. Within minutes, there were more people than artefacts. Soon the building was empty. And only afterwards came the clarity.

We should have stopped. Sent someone in with a camera and captured it intact. The workbenches with hardware in mid-repair, receipts taped to machines belonging to customers who never came back. I saw a Commodore mug on the counter. I passed it. Then doubled back. Wait, I can just take that. It was gone.

Outside, the parking lot was filled with piles. Hardware stacked on asphalt, people hovering over their spoils. Some even discarding things or making trades. There was no ceremony. No joy. Even the giant Commodore sign lay on the ground. I didn't even think to grab it.

It should have been the dream. Instead, it felt like we'd shown up early to a funeral and started picking at the body before anyone had a chance to say goodbye. *

MASSIVE CLEAROUT!
LATE 80s COMPUTER STORE. UNTOUCHED SINCE CLOSURE. FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED. TAKE EVERYTHING.
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Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

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THE ULTIMATE C64 SLIM

A NEW C64C MODEL IS NEXT UP FROM COMMODORE

» Although the old bread bin design is iconic, many C64 fans will have grown up using the 'C' model.

Following a "'C' you soon" teaser, the resurrected Commodore International is to expand its Ultimate C64 line-up later this year with a new C64C edition.

The C64C was the first major revision of the C64. It was launched in 1986 and featured a sleek cream-coloured case that was more aligned to the look of the Commodore 128. The 'C' in its name had nothing to do with 'Case', 'Cream' or 'Compact' however. It actually stood for 'Cost-reduced' – it was a way for Commodore to make production savings and reduce the cost to the consumer. The VIC-II and SID chips were revised, and it's often said that the new SID plays samples at a lower volume than the original. None of that matters when it comes to the Ultimate C64C as it will offer identical performance to the 'bread bin' model that launched to acclaim late last year.

In a neat move, Commodore has actually acquired the original factory tooling that was used to create the original casing, so the new case will be identical, imperfections and all. As with its predecessor, the Ultimate C64C will be available in three editions: Basic, Starlight and the Founder's, which is limited to just 3,200 units. Preorders are open now at Commodore.net 'C' you there?

THEA1200 DELAYED

BAD NEWS: THERE'S A HOLD-UP. GOOD NEWS: FULL GAMES LIST REVEALED

» Unlike the previous THEA500 Mini model, THEA1200 features a full-sized working keyboard.

Retro Games Ltd has announced THEA1200, its full-size recreation of the Amiga 1200 computer, has been pushed back to later in the year.

Citing global chip shortages and rising plastic production costs for the delay, the device is now planned to release on 4 December. "This machine is about delivering the best possible Amiga experience," said RGL CTO Chris Smith, "and that means taking the time to get it right." The company stressed that no other details have changed, it's just arriving a few months later.

RGL has also confirmed the full list of 25 games that'll come pre-installed, which we're sharing here. It's a solid list, even if it does lean heavily on Cinemaware titles. It would also have been nice to see a few more AGA-enhanced titles. Anyway, we can pass time waiting for the release by trying to guess what 'extra' games might be included as Easter eggs. Looking at the list, our money is on *Mercenary: The Second City* and *Alien Breed 2* (which was originally bundled with the CD32 version of *Alien Breed: Tower Assault*).

THEA1200 GAMES LIST

- **Alien Breed: Tower Assault** Team 17
- **Beneath A Steel Sky** Revolution Software
- **Defender Of The Crown** Cinemaware
- **Defender Of The Crown II** Cinemaware
- **It Came From The Desert** Cinemaware
- **It Came From The Desert II: Antheads** Cinemaware
- **The King Of Chicago** Cinemaware
- **Lords Of The Rising Sun** Cinemaware
- **Lure Of The Temptress** Revolution Software
- **Mercenary: Escape From Targ** Novagen
- **Reshoot Proxima 3** Spieleschreiber
- **Rocket Ranger** Cinemaware
- **Ruff 'N' Tumble** Renegade
- **SDI** Cinemaware
- **The Settlers II** Look Behind You
- **Sinbad And The Throne Of The Falcon** Cinemaware
- **Slam Tilt** 21st Century
- **Turrican** Rainbow Arts
- **Turrican II: The Final Fight** Rainbow Arts
- **Turrican 3** Rainbow Arts
- **TV Sports Baseball** Cinemaware
- **TV Sports Basketball** Cinemaware
- **TV Sports Boxing** Cinemaware
- **TV Sports** Football Cinemaware
- **Wings** Cinemaware

PAC'S BACK

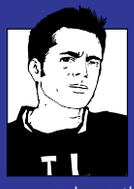
Remember the original *Pac-Man* TV series from 1982? Or the more recent *Pac-Man And The Ghostly Adventures*? Well, the Pac is back in *Sneak Breaks*, a new animated series now showing exclusively on YouTube. "What a-MAZE-ing challenges will Pac-Man chomp through?" asks the pun-heavy blurb. Well, we're chomping at the bit to find out. *Sneak Breaks* premiered in May and there will be new episodes added every month. Watch it here: spr.ly/PACMANofficial

TEKKEN LEAVE

Tekken series veteran Katsuhiro Harada has founded a new studio, VS Studio. The developer left Bandai Namco at the end of last year, after being with the business for 31 years. VS Studio will be a subsidiary of SNK. Given the name of the studio, and the involvement of *The King Of Fighters* firm, it seems pretty likely that Harada's outfit won't be making farming simulators.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Superstars?



For a while I was obsessed with a game called *Brian Jacks – Superstar Challenge*. It was a poor sports sim affair that really was a wafer-thin game based on a bizarre TV show that history has long since forgotten. If anyone remembers the programme at all, it's for Kevin Keegan falling off his bike and scraping his leg up badly. A classic mix of poodle perm and blood.

Interesting side note. I was at a memorial for Eddie Large and talking to Syd Little and Linda Lusardi when Keegan knocked on the window to let us know he was leaving. I have to pinch myself sometimes. What a life. So wonderful and yet so Partridge.

The show had minor celebs (certainly not superstars) doing squats thrusts and this lifting thing on parallel bars. Were they called dips? We all watched because we only had three channels. My kids absolutely crucify me when I say that. They start laughing at me when I try and explain that TV also shut off for a bit in the afternoon and at 11.30pm. And when I finally land on the, 'There were only two hours of kid shows a day' I get a sarcastic and rather hurtful chant of 'GREAT STORY, GREAT STORY'.

I liked the game for two main reasons. Firstly, it came in a very satisfying clam shell-style box. I can feel it now – plastic envelope on the case where the actual paper cover would slip in, indented edge and a satisfying click when you opened and closed it. You don't get that with a download (GREAT STORY, GREAT STORY). The other reason is because it had Brian Jacks' name on it. I think he was originally a judo man. If you want a laugh, there's a great video on YouTube from about 1983 where you see him buying a home computer. Spoiler alert, he makes the wrong choice and buys an Atari XL. I've watched it a dozen times. Even he comes away disappointed with his choice.

Anyway, *Superstar Challenge* is a lousy, repetitive button basher of a game that under normal circumstances would have gotten short shrift. But having the cache of a fading star attached to it gave it some glamour. You could pretend you were ACTUAL BJ as you smashed Z and X to do those damn squats. I think there was a swimming section that was nigh-on impossible as you had to time your breaths perfectly. All in all, it was an absolute stinker with almost no redeeming features. And yet I spent hours on it. In part it was that thing of I'd spent money on the flipping thing so I wanted to make sure I got some return, but also… the allure of Brian himself. A rather dull, humourless chap when on the telly, but a celeb to me. The British Chuck Norris if you will.

I just checked and I have good news. Brian is still alive, is 79 years old, and could probably still batter. Keep doing those squats Mr Jacks. I am saluting you with all my might. *

> "Superstar Challenge is a lousy, repetitive button basher of a game"

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

The ticket masters

If I haven't already mentioned it, I'm a grandad. Literally. I have two grandsons who are excellent. We went away on a short caravan break with them recently, and – as is tradition when you visit the seaside – we took them to an arcade.

Mainly, I wanted to play the Penny Falls, but I was astonished by how arcades have evolved to compete with home gaming. Every single cabinet in the place was a ticket machine – no matter how badly you did on a particular game, they would regurgitate a long string of tickets, which could be redeemed at the counter for a novelty pencil topper. Get ten million tickets and you might even be able to win a pencil to go with it!

When I was in my prime, the focus of the arcade was very much on the machines offering experiences you couldn't get at home. That is still the case, but with modern games machines offering visuals far beyond what most arcade games achieve, they're having to go to bizarre lengths to justify their existence.

I was alarmed to learn that lightgun games are now water cannon games – literally, the mounted guns now spray water at the on-screen targets. Shoot a power-up and the stream becomes thicker. Another was like a version of *Rampage*, albeit with a large rubber wrecking ball that you physically swung towards the screen.

There was fun to be had – and a pocket to be emptied of £1 coins – but I found the whole thing a bit depressing. I mean, arcades always had that sort of vibe, like they're filthy places that you're lucky to emerge from without some sort of high viral load. But what's lost in this ticket-winning madness is that feeling of just playing for the fun of it, and the feeling of spectacle. It all feels a bit grubby, in more ways than one.

I guess the tickets are a sort of physical embodiment of high scores, but I'm such an inept gamer that I never went into any arcade expecting to be afforded the opportunity to input "BUM" onto the high-score screen. I'd go there to explore a cave of wonders.

Dragon's Lair. Asteroids. Battlezone. I'm old enough to even remember playing those early mechanical Sega machines like *Killer Shark*. They felt like magical portals to elsewhere, these flickering boxes of unreality.

Maybe it's an age thing – most things are at my advanced years – but all I see now is the engine of capitalism behind every game. The noise and the visuals, and the inevitable novelty control system, all designed to lure you to their slot with the hope of pumping in enough coins that you'll leave with a hastily assembled sweat-shop Minion.

I hadn't long begun working as a games journalist when arcades first began this slide, with the likes of the full-size *Ridge Racer* car, *Virtuality* headsets, and *Galaxian 3* – which billed itself as the world's largest arcade game.

I guess I'm pleased that arcades still exist. I just wish they were still there for the joy of playing, instead of being a monumental waste of paper.

Also, they're too loud. Turn it down. <GRUMBLES IN OLD MAN VOICE> *

> "There was fun to be had – and a pocket to be emptied of coins"

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SECRET MODE

» [PC] *Beyond Words* is the brainchild of Rare veterans Steve Ellis and David Doak. This is how it was looking, five weeks into its development.

MindFuel Games

Rare legends Steve Ellis and David Doak on their brand-new studio

Words by Darran Jones

After working together at Rare on the likes of *GoldenEye 007* and *Perfect Dark*, Steve Ellis and David Doak cofounded Free Radical Games with other Rare alumni and created the likes of *TimeSplitters* and *Haze*. The duo are now back with a brand-new studio and the entertaining *Beyond Words*, a Roguelike *Scrabble* variant. So how did it all come together?

What was the reasoning behind setting up MindFuel Games?

Steve Ellis: After Embracer closed down Free Radical Design and our new *TimeSplitters* project, we wanted to continue to work together – but we didn't want to be at the mercy of any publisher's whims and mismanagement. We also wanted to be more hands-on with the development rather than just managing it. So, we decided to set up a small studio and have a go at making games that don't need more than the two of us.

David Doak: Steve and I hadn't worked together for a long time before the Embracer/FRD v2 project. That unfortunately ended in a lamentable fashion which was out of our control and not of our choice. However, it was great to reconnect with Steve and rekindle the spark of working together. So here we are. Doing the Blues Brothers thing.

How does it compare to working at a company like Rare?

SE: At Rare we just did the development. We were completely shielded from the commercial realities of developing and releasing a game (funding, milestones, PR, marketing, etc). We could just work on the game until it was good enough. It was a great environment to work in for all of those reasons, but it was also a product of its time. Budgets were massively lower, so more flexibility was possible. I'm not sure that anything like that exists anywhere any more.

DD: Obviously a lot is different – however the buzz of being able to iterate quickly and find the fun in a small team is very addictive. I think a lot of our working practice at Rare on the *GoldenEye* team would seem very familiar to an indie developer today – we've tried to recreate that at MindFuel.

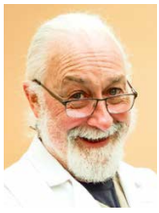
You clearly both like working together, how does the relationship between the pair of you work?

SE: We each have our strengths and we each usually know what the other will think about any given topic – it makes it easy and quick to make decisions about what we're doing.

DD: Steve gets everything done and I occasionally have an idea that isn't rubbish.

This is your third studio you've founded together. What have you learned since the two iterations of Free Radical Design?

SE: The original Free Radical Design taught us a lot about the things we didn't have to do at Rare



» David Doak cofounded Free Radical Design after working at Rare.

» Steve Ellis is another cofounder of Free Radical Design and a Rare veteran.

– and ultimately the risks of being independent. The reformed Free Radical Design taught us about the risks of not being independent. I guess overall we've learned that making games is a lot more risky than it once was – but we still can't imagine doing anything else.

DD: That game development endlessly changes but it is still a compelling creative process.

Also that we'd rather directly make things than manage other people doing it.

We're having a lot of fun with *Beyond Words*, why create a *Scrabble*-like take on the Roguelike genre?

SE: When we started there wasn't anything like it, so we did a quick prototype and it seemed like it had legs. Since then there have been a few other word-based Roguelikes released, but we think that they missed some opportunities afforded by having a game board to play on.

DD: Always liked *Scrabble* – but it can be a bit meh. Always liked physical deckbuilders – ever since *Dominion*, *Ascension* etc. Always liked Roguelikes since, well, *Rogue* (yes, on a DEC MicroVAX). Inevitable really. Actually, it was Steve's idea.

We've been impressed with the game's overall design and its stacking of multipliers to boost your score. How long did it take to perfect?

SE: We've been working on *Beyond Words* for nearly two years – and we're still working on it now.

DD: Thank you! Although this kind of design defies attempts to make it perfect. There are so many moving parts in the systems and interactions between them that it is an almost never-ending journey to tweak and refine them. The meta game of building a game like this is fun but tough. Maybe in time we can get it to a stage where you are fully impressed.

Beyond Words is a world away from the numerous first-person shooters you've both made. Were you not tempted to attempt a Roguelike take on that genre?

> "We've been working on Beyond Words for nearly two years – and we're still working on it now"
>
> **STEVE ELLIS**

» [PC] The cards shown at the top of the screen become critical as they can boost your score and the points on your tiles.

» [PC] Some stages introduce additional challenges. Here, you have to contend with a timer.

SE: The shooter genre is dominated by a small number of very big companies and player expectations are incredibly high. It would be difficult for a two-person team to compete in that space, even with a great idea.

DD: Another thing we've noticed about shooters is that we're not getting better at playing them.

What are the challenges of making a smaller game like this compared to a AAA release, and is it difficult to get your game noticed?

SE: For a AAA game the challenges are getting it off the ground – getting a publisher interested is nearly impossible and keeping them interested (and paying the bills) all the way to the end is very hard too. Smaller games don't have those challenges, but this means that it's a much more crowded market. Yes, it isn't easy to get noticed.

» [PC] *Beyond Words* mixes *Scrabble* with games like *Balatro* to great effect.

DD: Absolutely – discovery is a major challenge. Making a good game is just one component in a fiendish machine which is constantly churning and changing in ways that are almost impossible to understand. Lions and tigers and bears and influencers and content creators…

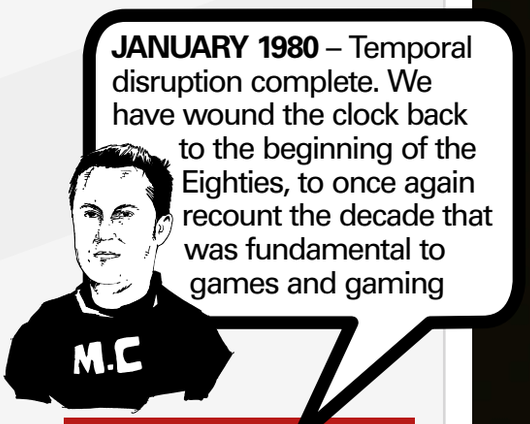
So what's on the horizon for MindFuel Games' future?

SE: We haven't decided yet but I enjoy doing new things, so probably something else that we've never done before.

DD: We're doing *GTA VII*, but keep it under your hat. ✱

» [PC] Here's an early build from day four of *Beyond Words*'s development.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

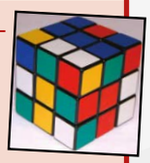


JANUARY 1980 – Temporal disruption complete. We have wound the clock back to the beginning of the Eighties, to once again recount the decade that was fundamental to games and gaming

THE MONTH'S HIGHLIGHTS

IN THE WORLD

News In Brief



The Rubik's Cube makes its international debut at a London hobby fair. US President Jimmy Carter announces that his country will boycott the Olympic Games in Moscow. Beatle Paul McCartney is briefly jailed in Tokyo for marijuana possession and deported. Get back,Paul.

IN THE CHARTS

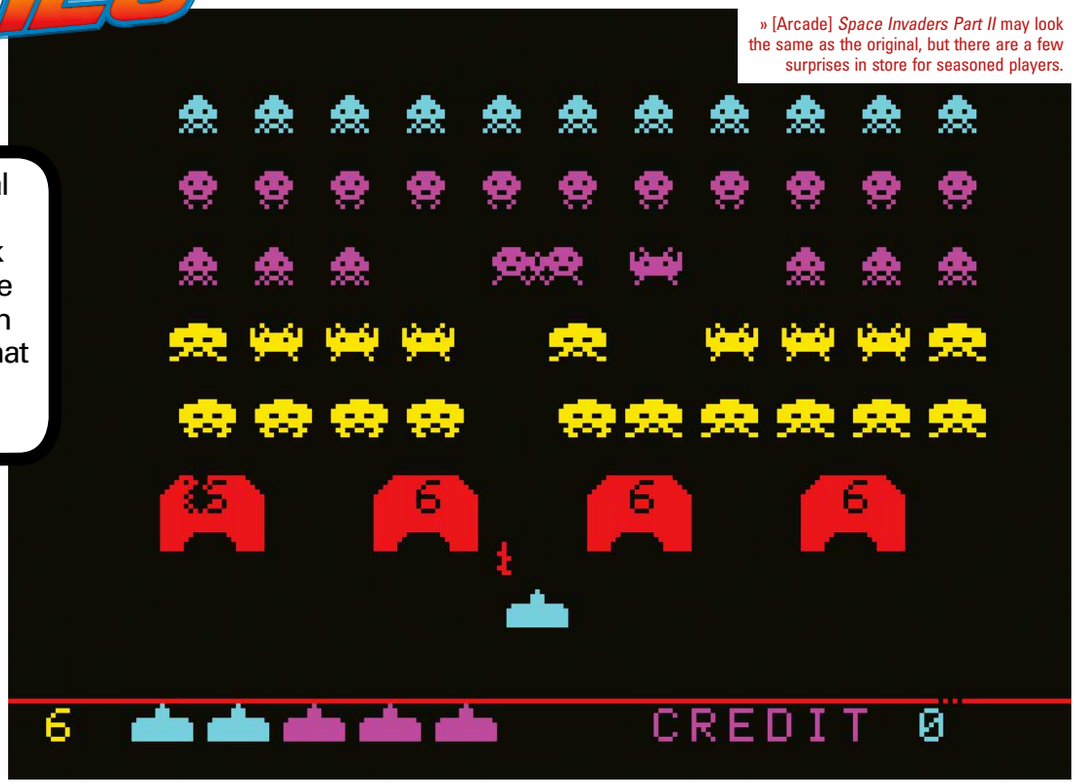
Pretenders On Top

Brass In Pocket from the Pretenders is the best-selling single in the UK this month. *Another Brick In The Wall* (Pink Floyd) and *My Girl* (Madness) also sell strongly. New long-playing releases this month include *True Colours* (Split Enz) and *Permanent Waves* (Rush).

IN THE CINEMA

Trek Vs Kramer

Two December releases dominate in January. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* tops the box office during the first week, but *Kramer Vs Kramer* takes the crown for the remainder of the month. The Dustin Hoffman starring movie will go on to bag five Academy Awards.

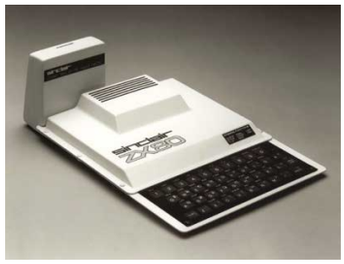


» [Arcade] *Space Invaders Part II* may look the same as the original, but there are a few surprises in store for seasoned players.

JANUARY 1980

Atari invades your space and computers get personal

Even as the new decade begins, *Space Invaders* continues its relentless assault. Taito's 1978 coin-op has become a phenomenon the world over, and now the sequel is descending on arcades. Released in Japan the previous year, *Space Invaders Part II* (aka *Deluxe Space Invaders*) makes its worldwide debut this month. The sequel doesn't take many risks, adding just a few tweaks to the winning formula. The main difference is a sense of progression, with subsequent stages now introducing new challenges such as invaders that split in two and UFOs that deploy additional invaders. The *Cashbox* trade publication says the new additions will, "Test the skill and add to the enjoyment of the most avid and adept players."



» Sinclair Research claims it ordered enough components to build 100,000 ZX80s – and managed to sell every single one.

While the early consoles are taking root at the start of the new decade, home computers are at a crucial turning point. In the January issue of influential US magazine *Byte*, editor Carl Helmers pens an impassioned editorial entitled 'The Era Of Off-The-Shelf Personal Computers Has Arrived'. Speaking about the rise of computers as mass-market consumer devices, he writes, "[Now] it is possible to enter a computer store and witness the operation of a typical modem system, try it out, then purchase one just like it to take home and use." A case in point: the issue carries ads for the new Atari 400 and 800 computers that had launched in November 1979. These are complete and capable home computers that you can take home for $550 (the 400) and $999 (the 800).

At the other end of the affordability scale, Sinclair Research launches the ZX80 at a computer exhibition in London on 29 January. This tiny micro retails for just £99 (and you can save yourself a further 20 quid if you want to put it together yourself). It's billed as the world's smallest and cheapest home computer. "It's the biggest leap forward we've ever made in terms of price and technology," crows Clive Sinclair to the press. The system is limited in many areas, but it will help kick-start the home-computing craze in the UK at the onset of the Eighties. ✱

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF JANUARY 1980

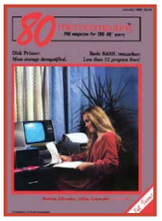
Atari Tops 1979

The January issue of Atari's own *Coin Connection* trade magazine reveals that its own titles dominated the list of 1979's highest-earning coin-op games, based on a US survey of arcade operators. Top money-spinners from the company include *Atari Football*, *Sprint 2*, *Video Pinball* and *Super Breakout*. Needless to say, it was a fantastic start to Atari's year.

Radio Scrap?

Softside magazine shares complaints it has received about the reliability of the new TRS-80 Model II, Tandy's business computer that was released in October 1979 and ranged in price from $3,450 for the base model, to a staggering $6,599. Of the five systems that were purchased from Tandy's Radio Shack stores, three were malfunctioning, one was dead on arrival, and one was working just fine. Nice job Tandy!

TRS Monthly



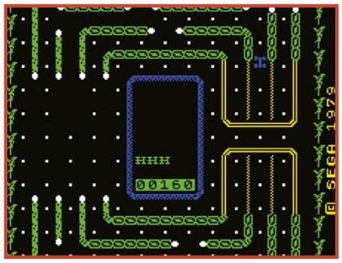
The first issue of *80 Microcomputing* hits the newsstands this month and makes for a very interesting read due to articles like The Tandy Story and Hidden Codes & Missing Chips. The magazine, published and edited by Wayne Green, is aimed at Tandy TRS-80 users and quickly becomes a top-selling monthly. It will run for a total of 101 issues before wrapping up in June 1988.

Cosmic Copycat

The fourth game in Universal's *Cosmic* series of blatant arcade clones, *Cosmic Alien*, takes aim at Namco's *Galaxian* and isn't far off. If we're being brutally honest, it's just a little too slow to be a truly enjoyable alternative to Namco's classic blaster. A further four games in this impudent series will follow over the next two years, all of varying quality.

Sim Takes Flight

Reports vary, but the consensus is that the first commercial release of *Flight Simulator* is for the Apple II this very month. Written by Bruce Artwick and published by Sublogic, it is later licensed to Microsoft and the long-running sim series is cleared for takeoff.



Sega On The Hunt

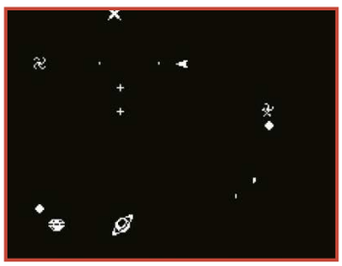
Sega debuts *Car Hunt* in arcades this month. Not one you've probably heard of, it's a single-screen maze game where you control a car that's chased by the cops. Yes, it's another *Pac-Man* clone. Except that *Pac-Man* wouldn't be released for another four months.

1K Not Okay

The ZX80 is cheap because it's bare-boned, coming with just 1K of RAM – and some of that is reserved for the screen display. So to do anything practical users need more memory. Sinclair comes to the rescue with its official RAM Pack which adds up to 3K extra.

Asteroids Rocks

It was only launched at the AMOA show in November 1979, but Atari's vector shooter *Asteroids* proves to be an immediate success, becoming the number one coin-op of the month. It occupies the top spot ahead of Namco's *Galaxian* and Atari's *Lunar Lander*.

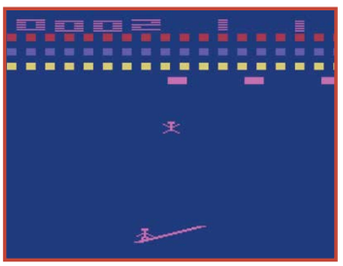


Ultimate Vortex

This coin-op from Zilec Games is rushed out to capitalise on the success of *Asteroids*. Nothing to see here, except – the names of its authors are hidden in the code: Chris Stamper and John Lathbury. The pair would go on to form Ultimate Play The Game.

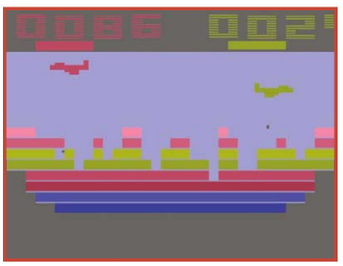
Under Megatack

Arriving from Centuri this month is yet another space shooter. *Megatack* is at least novel in that there are two distinct attack waves, and in the first your ship fires three shots – one straight up and two diagonally. This adds a (slight) extra dimension to the game.



Circus In Town

Releasing a game for the Atari 2600 in the same month as *Space Invaders* is perhaps not the smartest move, but Atari's version of Exidy's *Circus* coin-op is a fun arcade alternative that sees you using a seesaw to flip little guys up the screen to burst the (square) balloons.



Top Bomber

Despite being released in spring 1979, *Canyon Bomber* is the best-selling Atari 2600 game this month. This enjoyable conversion of Atari's 1977 coin-op was programmed by David Crane – who has since left Atari along with three other programmers to form Activision.

HI

Pole Position

RACING INTO YOUR LIVING ROOM

» RETROREVIVAL

» ATARI 2600 » 1983 » ATARI INC

You have to admire the tenacity of Atari 2600 programmers. The console provided an adequate home for many of the Golden Age arcade hits, but then games like *Pole Position* came speeding into view in 1982. Namco felt that its F1-themed arcade game was too ambitious to run on existing hardware, so it created a custom setup powered by not one, but two Z8000 CPUs. That is not a typo – the Z8000 was Zilog's often forgotten 16-bit successor to the popular Z80. This computing power allowed for pseudo-3D graphics and scaled sprites, resulting in the most realistic racing game to date. How was the 2600, with its 8-bit 6502-based CPU running at just over 1MHz, supposed to recreate *Pole Position*?

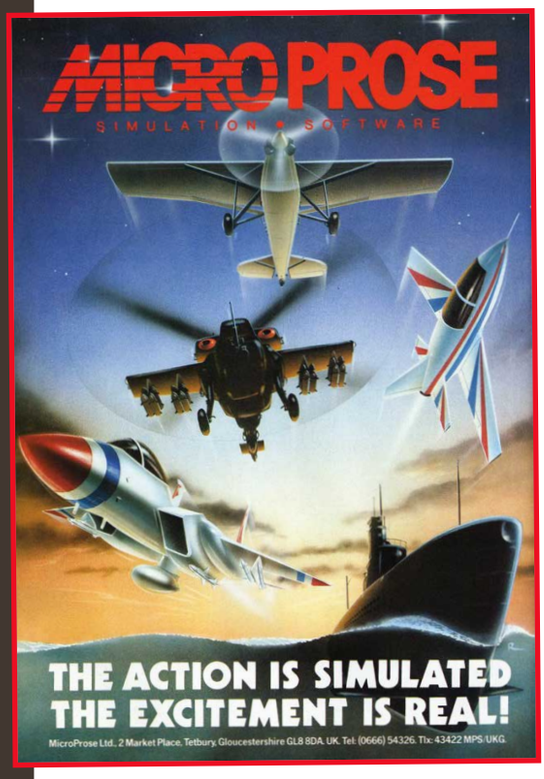
With compromises, is the obvious answer. There's no trackside scenery for a start, with the only scaled objects being the competitor's cars, which are made up of a few orange blocks. There's no start/finish either, and visual touches like the little blimp appearing at the beginning of the race, and Mount Fuji appearing in the background as you race around Fuji Speedway, are absent. But crucially, the game does recreate one of the coin-op's key features. Rather than the track being locked in position on the screen and your car moving left and right (like in Activision's rival racer *Enduro*, for example), in *Pole Position* your car stays central and it's the track that moves. This adds to the sense of racing realism, especially when cornering, and gives the game the feel of its coin-op big brother.

Elsewhere, the controls are quirky – or rather, backwards. Your car accelerates automatically and you must press the fire button to brake. That does take a little getting used to. Overall, this is a fantastic conversion and due credit goes to programmer Doug Macrae. He would comment on his conversion in **RG** 263, saying, "The 2600 was kept alive longer than anybody ever expected by engineers trying to push its limits. Creating a close as possible rendition of an arcade machine required a very different kind of creativity." Creativity, yes, and no short amount of ambition. ✱

THE LEGACY OF THE COMMODORE

THE COMMODORE 64 MAY HAVE RESEMBLED A VIC-20, BUT INSIDE ITS DRAB BEIGE CASE LAY AN 8-BIT POWERHOUSE THAT WOULD DOMINATE THE COMPUTER GAME INDUSTRY AND CREATE A LASTING LEGACY. JOIN US AS WE INVITE KEY FIGURES TO EXAMINE THE C64'S IMPACT AND ITS CONTINUED POPULARITY

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL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» MicroProse was a leading publisher on the C64, responsible for a range of strategy and simulation games.

No one's really sure how popular the Commodore 64 was. If you take unit sales as the key metric you'll find a wide range of conflicting figures. Commodore founder Jack Tramiel once claimed it was as high as 30 million units sold worldwide. Commodore itself later chimed in with a more conservative 17 million. More recently, Guinness World Records adjudged it to be closer to the 12.5 million mark. Even at that lower end, the C64 is comfortably the world's best-selling desktop computer. Nothing else comes close.

So why was the C64 so popular, outselling the rest? It's simple really. It was powerful but wasn't too pricey. Advanced yet affordable. The best bang for your buck. And crucially, it proved to be a very capable gaming system thanks to its superior graphic and sound capabilities. Commodore hedged its bets by marketing it as an all-purpose computer – great for business, education and productivity – but the hardware was clearly designed with gaming in mind. It might have been powered by the same 6502-series 1MHz CPU as the VIC-20, but it was now bolstered by the VIC-II video chip, which supported hardware sprites and smooth scrolling, and the SID three-channel sound chip. Plus, it came with a generous 64K of memory. You didn't need all that oomph to run EasyCalc or Micro Cookbook.

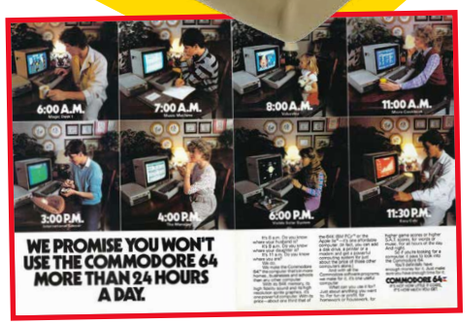
> "WE WERE RIGHT TO WAIT FOR THE C64 AND NOT GET DISTRACTED BY THE CROWDED Z80 MARKET"
> **ANDY WALKER**

Just how capable was the C64 as a gaming system, compared to other computers? Someone who's ideally placed to answer is Shahid Ahmad. He's been programming games since 1983 and his early work includes the C64 conversions of Software Projects' *Jet Set Willy* and Ultimate's *Night Shade*. In 1985 he designed *Chimera* which was published by Firebird. The game was released for four systems – Commodore 64, Atari 8-bit, Spectrum and Amstrad CPC – and Shahid wrote every version. So how did the C64 stack up?

"To answer this properly, we have to understand where the C64 was weak," he says. "Let's not mince words, the CPU was weak. Running at around 1MHz, it was half the speed of an Atari 400, which also had a 6502. The Spectrum and Amstrad CPC had more powerful Z80 chips, which while not directly comparable in terms of clock speed, nevertheless had a much more flexible instruction set, allowing programmers to retain more state when writing screen drawing routines. The C64's hardware had to do a lot of heavy lifting." The CPU wasn't the fastest, admittedly, but it was ably supported by the ▶

RE 64!

» [C64] The popular *International Football*, written by Andrew Spencer, debuted on C64 cartridge in 1983.



» This early ad shows Commodore's initial approach. The C64 was designed for the living room, for the whole family to use – not hidden away in Sonny's bedroom so he could play silly games.

Commodore Creatives

SHAHID AHMAD

■ Shahid is an industry legend, credited on more than 100 games. His earliest work was for the Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit computers.

ANDY WALKER

■ Designer of the influential 1982 arcade game *The Pit*, Andy went on to form Taskset, a C64 studio famous for its off-beat games.

DAVID DARLING

■ With his brother Richard, David developed a number of hit games for Mastertronic before branching off to form Codemasters in 1986.

MATT HOUSEHOLDER

■ In his distinguished career in games, Matt has worked for Gottlieb, Atari, Epyx and Blizzard. He once held the title of chief fun officer.

CHRIS HUELSBECK

■ Respected composer Chris wrote his first videogame music on the C64. Working for Rainbow Arts, he scored the *Turrican* series.

JASON MACKENZIE

■ 'Kenz' is a hero of the C64 scene, thanks to his years of service running *Commodore Zone*, Binary Zone and Psytronik Software.

Commodore 64 ORIGINALS

TRAILBLAZING TITLES THAT ORIGINATED ON THE C64

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

1984 • EPYX

■ Dennis Caswell's game is so well presented (that animation, that speech, that anguished scream when you drop down a lift shaft), that it's easy to overlook what a masterful puzzle-platformer this is. It's also unbelievably tense for an 8-bit game, as you try to cheat death in every room of the evil genius' underground lair.

PARADROID

1985 • GRAFTGOLD

■ This early work from legendary developer Andrew Braybrook brilliantly mixes elements of exploration, puzzle-solving and good old blasting. Technically it's a triumph, featuring a fast and smooth scrolling viewpoint. Andrew would refine his concept several times, but in truth the original was already pretty perfect.

WIZBALL

1984 • SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

■ A strong candidate for the C64's finest and most original title. Admittedly it's a game that needs to 'click' (especially if you're expecting a simple shooter), but once it does it's impossible to resist. The Sensible guys supplement the gameplay with first-rate presentation, underscored by Mr Galway's wonderful sonics.

THE LAST NINJA

1987 • SYSTEM 3

■ This was a game C64 owners could crow about, as it failed to materialise on the Spectrum or Amstrad CPC. And regardless, those versions could have never matched the beautiful isometric visuals of the C64 original. It can be frustrating at times, and it was surpassed by the modern-set sequel, but it remains a showcase game.

MANIAC MANSION

1987 • LUCASFILM GAMES

■ It may have launched simultaneously on the Apple II (shhh!), but this game simply has to make our list. This was the first of the SCUMM-powered point-and-click adventures and it's an audacious debut that dishes up quirky puzzles and genuine laughs. Lucasfilm's follow-up, *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders*, is also a blast.

TURRICAN

1990 • RAINBOW ARTS

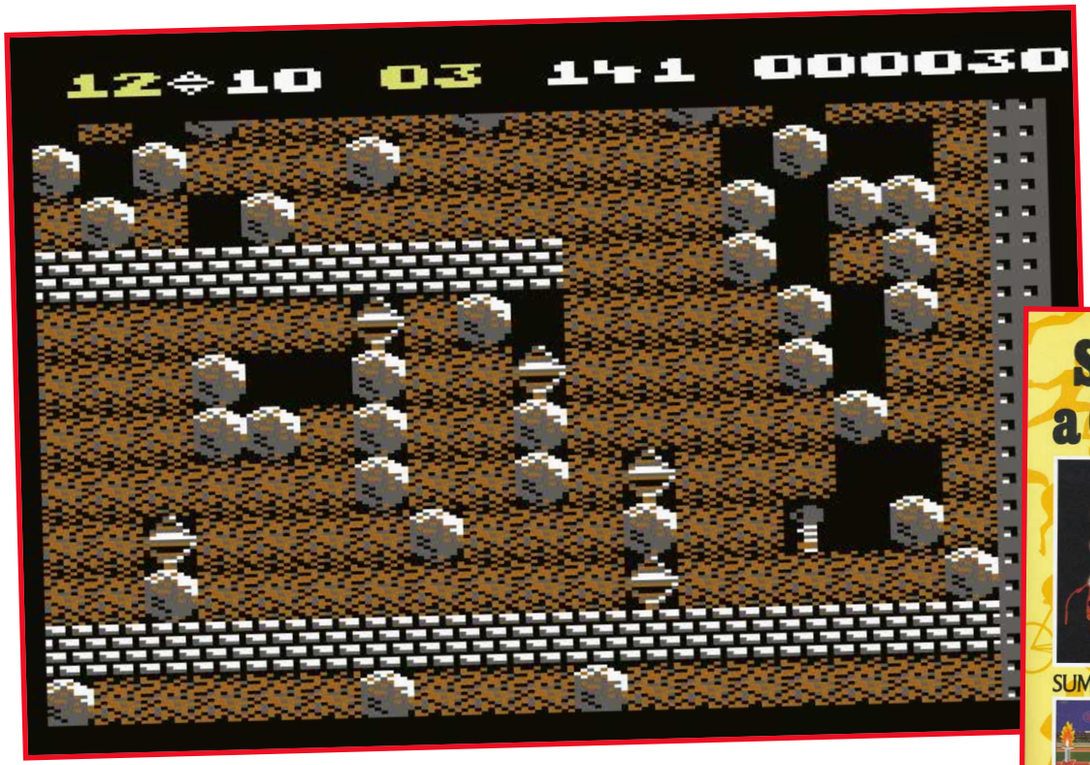
■ It's 1990 and the C64 still has the power to amaze. This Manfred Trenz creation is a fantastic platform-shooter that has a real console feel, in terms of pace and presentation. Throw in Chris Huelsbeck's amazing soundtrack and you have a true benchmark title. A sequel arrived the following year and it's somehow even better.

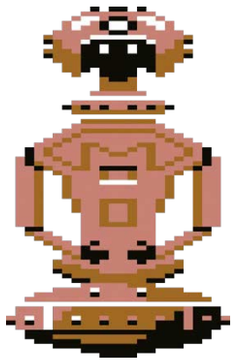
» [C64] Games evolved fast on the C64. Early releases like *Super Blitz* quickly looked archaic.

» [C64] Originally developed for the Atari 400/800, the C64 version of *Bruce Lee* benefits from slightly faster gameplay and improved audio.

▶ VIC-II and SID. As Shahid puts it, the C64 had a strong hand. "The C64 had two aces up its sleeve, and a trump card. The first ace was the character-mapped display that allowed for colours to be individually set for each pixel. This screen could be smooth-scrolled in hardware. Once the scroll limit had been reached, you had a fraction of the memory to shift compared to the bitmapped displays of the Spectrum and the Amstrad CPC. The second ace was the provision of hardware sprites, eight of them, which could be multiplexed further down the screen if needed. As for the trump card, well that was the mighty SID chip, and it's a testament to its sound that it's still used by some musicians today."

The C64 would help launch Shahid's long career in games, which would include a decade at Sony Computer Entertainment Europe working on PlayStation platforms. Gaming hardware evolved rapidly, but there were learnings from the C64 days he could take forward. "The beauty of programming in the early to mid-Eighties was that a single programmer could maintain the entire program state in their head. If you could imagine it, you could probably do it. As for the lessons I learned, there were two. First, that code is intrinsically just. You get a perfect reflection of your own skill and understanding. The computer would give you back exactly what you put in, no more, no less. Second, that





» [C64] *Boulder Dash*'s Rockford was so fast on the C64 that the screen couldn't keep up with him.

constraints are an amazing tool for creativity. Nowadays, with practically boundless compute and memory resources available, applying artificial constraints to a seemingly intractable problem can yield surprising solutions." Back then, it was not about a shift in mindset. The C64's slow CPU meant that programmers *had* to write tight, efficient code and adopt a smart approach to problem-solving.

> **"DIVING IN AND SEEING WHAT THE VIC-II AND SID CHIPS WERE BRINGING TO THE PARTY WAS REWARDING FUN"**
> **ANDY WALKER**

Someone else who gravitated to the Commodore computer was Andy Walker, founder of software house Taskset. Best known for creating quirky, highly original hits like *Super Pipeline* and *Poster Paster*, Taskset was a C64 house by design. "I came from a coin-op background and also an electronics and hardware background," he says. "The spec of the C64 was tantalising and I wanted one from the moment they were announced in the US. I'd also come from a 6502 background, using the VIC-20 and Oric-1, so I was ready for this step-up. The wait to finally get my hands on this delicious new hardware was hard to bear." When the C64 finally arrived at Taskset's base in Bridlington, Yorkshire, he and his team got to work, sizing up its potential. "Diving in and seeing what the VIC-II and SID chips were bringing to the party was the most rewarding fun in computing. At Taskset we approached it from an engineering perspective – wiggling the pins on the chips was more important than deciding which game we'd do first. We knew the importance of smooth presentation and flicker-free sprites so we prioritised achieving that. The hardware approach and interrupt structure was key to presentation. I learned a lot from skilled engineer partners – there was always a lot to learn, and in return I was able to donate graphic development utilities. The SID was such a leap forward from the ordinary AY-3-8910 synths that it became a discipline of its own. Here was a true games computer. Let's face it, it was best in class, the most wanted. We were right to wait for the C64 and not get distracted by the crowded Z80 market."

Between 1984 and 1986, Taskset would contribute a dozen games to the list of thousands that were released for the C64. Reflecting on that period, Andy believes the computer was a significant contributor to the adoption of computers in homes. "It had a massive impact," he says. "It was suddenly normal to find real computing power in the homes of regular consumer families. It was sold as a 'proper' computer – it had a QWERTY keyboard and there were word processors and other utilities published for it – but everyone knew what it was best at…"

» Epyx's *Games* series was designed for running from disk, although fiddly cassette versions were also released.

THEIR ONLY HOPE WAS YOUR PROMISE TO BRING THEM BACK ALIVE....
BEACH-HEAD II
INCREDIBLY REALISTIC VOICE SIMULATION
ONE PLAYER PLUS TRUE HEAD-TO-HEAD TWO PLAYER FACILITY
HIGH RESOLUTION ANIMATED GRAPHIC SCREENS
OVER 100,000 PROFILE CAPTURED THE BEACH-HEAD IN 1984! DARE YOU RETURN IN 1985?!!!
U.S. GOLD
ACCESS

» The *Beach Head* games and other Access hits landed on European shores courtesy of Birmingham-based US Gold.

» A slice of C64 perfection, *Paradroid* was written by Andrew Braybrook and published by Hewson in 1985.

The computer's enviable gaming capabilities attracted teenage brothers David and Richard Darling. The siblings were Commodore kids, having first dabbled with programming on a Commodore PET. "We used our dad's Commodore PET at his company," remembers David. "The PET had a green-on-black screen and we used it to make a *Dungeons & Dragons* game for fun at the weekends. A friend then got a VIC-20, which had colour, so it was better for games, but it could only show a few characters. Then the C64 came out, and it was much better – 64K of RAM, improved graphics with eight sprites, smooth scrolling, more colours, and the SID chip." But for David, the appeal was more than just the hardware alone. "It was a fun computer, but really it was just a medium for playing games. What mattered was the quality of the games and the gameplay design. It helped that the C64 had an open architecture, with thousands of programmers around the world using it. It was a very active community, everyone was learning from each other, and there were lots of magazines. It was a great learning exercise."

"THE INDUSTRY OWES A LOT TO THE C64. IT TOOK GAMING FROM A HOBBY TO A MAINSTREAM FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT"
DAVID DARLING

The brothers would learn on the job, linking up with Mastertronic while barely out of school. They'd write a string of best sellers for the budget publisher, including *BMX Racers*, *Chiller* and *The Last V8*, before launching their own software company in 1986. That company was Codemasters, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. "It was definitely the most important computer in my career," says David, reflecting on the role of the C64 in his own story. "In the UK, the Sinclair Spectrum was probably more popular, but worldwide the C64 was much bigger. The C64 was very important in Codemasters' early days and was the main computer before we moved to the Commodore Amiga and the Atari ST. The home-computer games industry owes a lot to the C64. It took gaming from a hobby to a mainstream form of entertainment. Later, Codemasters moved into the console era with Nintendo and Sega, and then Sony, but none of that would have happened without the C64."

As David points out, the C64 achieved success around the world, not just in the UK and Europe. It was particularly successful in the US, where it competed with (and ultimately outsold) the Apple II and Atari 8-bit computers. One of the early adopters was coin-op developer Matt Householder. "In 1982, while I was working at Gottlieb designing and programming the *Krull* arcade game, my wife and I bought a C64, 1541 disk drive and an Epson MX-80 printer," he recalls. "We used a small black-and-white TV for the display, but I saw its potential for home-computer games."

Matt would soon leave Gottlieb and spend two years at Atari, before taking up a position as producer and designer at Epyx. Here he

THE C64 STUDIOS

DEVELOPERS THAT OWE A DEBT TO THE C64

EPYX

■ Founded in 1978, and therefore predating the C64 by several years, the computer became a vital platform for Epyx in the Eighties – thanks to hits like *Pitstop*, *Impossible Mission* and the *Games* series, beginning with *Summer Games* and peaking with *California Games*.

LUCASFILM GAMES

■ Another US firm founded in 1982 that targeted the C64 and reaped the rewards. Its clever point-and-click adventures often dominate the conversation, but it also created a number of fantastic arcade titles such as *The Eidolon*, *Rescue On Fractalus!*, and *Ballblazer*.

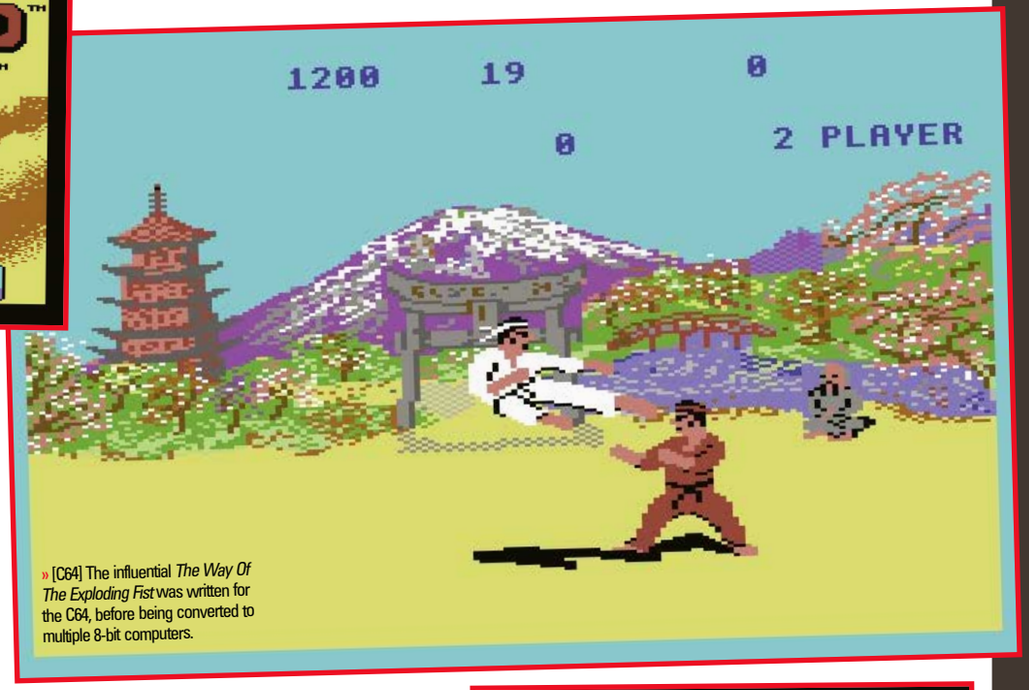
ELECTRONIC ARTS

■ The American videogame giant was established in 1982 by Trip Hawkins and the C64 was integral to its early success. It published many classic RPGs and expansive adventures for the system, including *The Bard's Tale* trilogy, *Wasteland*, *Neuromancer* and *Project Firestart*.

» [C64] If only screenshots had sound… Martin Galway's amazing theme music played as Ocean's *Rambo* loaded from tape.

finally got to work on the computer he had hooked up at home. "My first assignments at Epyx were *GI Joe*, *Barbie* and *Winter Games* for the C64 and Apple II. The C64 was clearly superior in graphic resolution and animation performance. In fact, the Mattel producer for *Barbie* harshly criticised the Apple II artwork, particularly her face and figure. He'd seen both C64 and Apple II versions and insisted we make the Apple II look as good. Ultimately, Epyx's art staff had to revamp the Apple II artwork and code to get Mattel's approval."

A key difference in the US was the large installed base of disk drives compared to other countries. In the UK, for example, it's estimated that only around one in ten C64 users owned a disk drive due to its high cost, preferring instead to stick with the old Datasette and tape games. "The 1541 drive loaded games from disk faster than cassette tape – somewhat! – but the random access made multi-load games more appealing," says Matt. "Epyx exploited the US market's majority installed base of 1541 owners in creating the hit *Games* sports series." ▶



» [C64] The influential *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* was written for the C64, before being converted to multiple 8-bit computers.

» [C64] Our interviewee Shahid Ahmad converted *Jet Set Willy* to the C64 in just four weeks.

» [C64] David Darling wrote multiple games for Mastertronic. This, *The Last V8*, was decent, but damned difficult.

SYSTEM 3

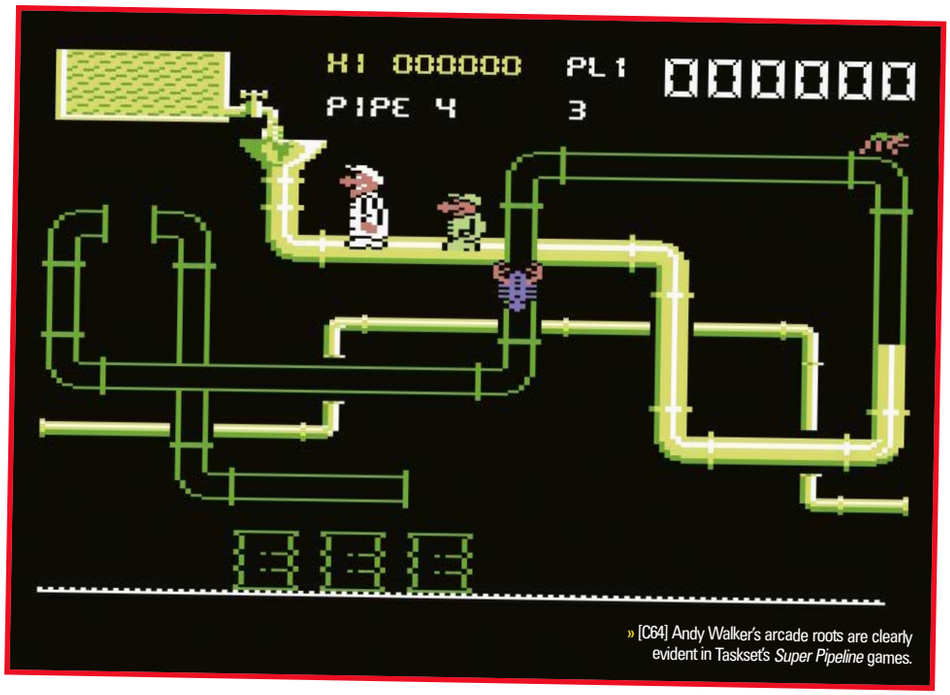
■ A UK software success story, System 3 was established in 1982 and is still operating to this day. The company targeted a range of systems, but C64 originals like its *Last Ninja* trilogy, *International Karate+* and *Myth* cemented System 3's position as a developer of distinction.

ACTIVISION

■ This publisher made its name developing Atari 2600 games, but having barely survived the US crash in 1983, it found its feet again by targeting the C64. Treasured titles like *Ghostbusters*, *Toy Bizarre* and *Little Computer People* followed, helping to diversify its output for the future.

ACCESS SOFTWARE INC

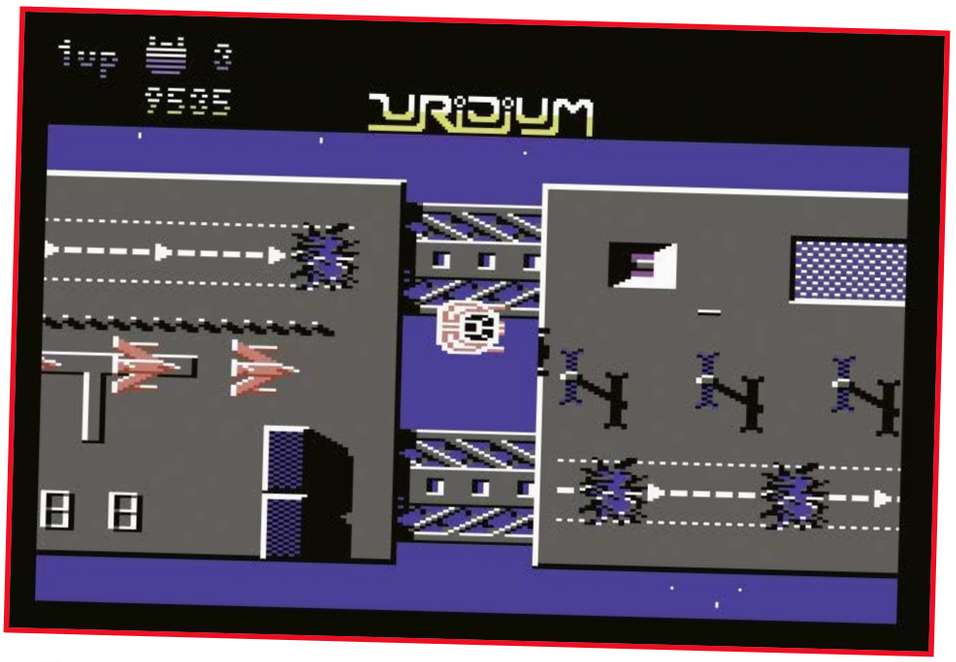
■ Access produced a string of C64 hits following its formation in 1982. Chief among those would be *Beach Head*, *Raid Over Moscow* and *Leaderboard Golf* (the forerunner to the *Links* series). Many of its most popular titles would later be brought to Europe by US Gold.



» [C64] Andy Walker's arcade roots are clearly evident in Tasksets *Super Pipeline* games.

» [C64] The rotating tower in *Nebulus* remains an impressive visual trick. The game was written by John M Phillips.

» [C64] *Leaderboard Golf* was the first of four popular golf games developed for the C64 by Access (Bruce and Roger Carver).



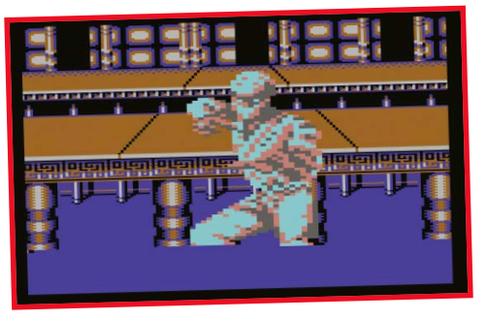
» [C64] Andrew Braybrook followed up *Paradroid* with *Uridium*, a technically masterful horizontal-scrolling shooter.

▶ Matt conceived the idea for the fifth entry, *California Games*, which was released in 1987. It quickly became Epyx's best-selling game, with C64 sales leading the charge.

"In the period I worked there, between 1985 and 1988, Epyx sold vastly more copies of its games on the C64 than other home computers of the era, including the Apple II, Tandy TRS-80 and Atari 800," reveals Matt. "By 1987, IBM PC clones with CGA or EGA graphics started to become a more important market for Epyx. And once the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga had debuted and built a base of US users, Epyx began converting its library of games to them. At the same time, the US game business was starting to shift back to consoles thanks to Nintendo's NES and its library of high-quality games." There was competition from other systems, but the affordability of C64 hardware and software was still attractive to consumers. "The lower cost of the C64 was instrumental in greater sales, but the higher-quality graphics, animation and sound certainly didn't hurt…"

Matt mentions sound there, as all of our interviewees have. Blessing the C64 with the SID chip was a masterstroke, allowing the computer to sing while other 8-bits were beeping and buzzing. Those that mastered the SID soon became well-known names like Rob Hubbard, Martin Galway and Ben Daglish. Keeping company with those guys was Chris Huelsbeck, who was attracted to the C64 as a teenager. "I was fascinated by electronic music from an early age and wanted to own a synthesiser, but my family couldn't afford such an expensive machine," he says. "I was also interested in computers and when I read in an advertisement that the C64 had a 'real' synthesiser sound chip, I thought it could be the answer. I could make synthesiser music with it and as a bonus get a computer to play with. I did a summer of gruelling newspaper deliveries to finally afford one and looking back it was definitely a solid decision to go that route."

Chris' 'sound' choice led to him working for German publisher Rainbow Arts where he would compose the C64 music for games like *The Great Giana Sisters*, *R-Type* and *Turrican*. "The SID differed significantly from other



» [C64] *Shinobi* was one of many excellent coin-op conversions released for Commodore's machine.

"THE FACT THAT PEOPLE STILL DISCOVER NEW PROGRAMMING TRICKS AND CREATE PREVIOUSLY UNHEARD SOUNDS SHOWS HOW REMARKABLE THE SID CHIP IS"
CHRIS HUELSBECK

sound chips of the time, offering multi-mode filters, waveforms, envelopes, pulse-width modulation, and sync and ring-modulation features," he says. "From day one, I tried to push the envelope – pun intended – and developed some tricks to make it sound like more voices were playing than the hardware's three channels. I also developed my own sound editor, SoundMonitor, which many people consider the grandfather of trackers."

Others pushed that literal envelope too, but Chris reveals there wasn't much rivalry between the SID composers back then. "I admired their work, but I never had contact or met them until many years after the C64 era," he comments. "However, there is one time I felt I missed out on a bit of recognition. I developed my technique for playing samples in the spring of 1987, but none of our games at Rainbow Arts were ready until the end of the year. Meanwhile, Martin Galway had written the music for *Arkanoid* in the summer, which used a similar trick to play short snippets of generated digital waveforms in addition to the three SID channels." But he's not bitter, and remains in admiration of what people have produced with the SID, back then and since. "The fact that people still discover new programming tricks and create previously unheard sounds to this day shows how remarkable the SID chip is."

Perhaps the C64's true legacy is its longevity. Despite Commodore shifting its focus to the Amiga family, it was still manufacturing the C64 until 1994 – and production would have probably continued had the company not filed for bankruptcy the following year. The rate of new game releases slowed to a trickle and the magazines closed – in the UK, *Commodore Force* (formerly *Zzap!64*) stopped publishing in March 1994 and *Commodore Format* soldiered on until October 1995.

THE CONVERSION KING

THE C64 WAS HOME TO SOME CLASSY COIN-OP CONVERSIONS

BUBBLE BOBBLE

■ This could be one of the best coin-op conversions on any format, bringing the delightful arcade platformer to the C64 with very few compromises. The C64 version of arcade sequel *Rainbow Islands* is also excellent, but this is a true co-op classic, so it gets our vote.

BUGGY BOY

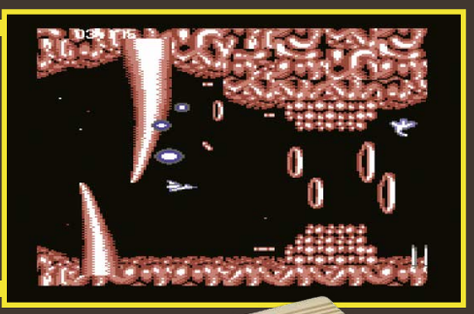
■ This is how you approach a conversion, by making it work within the confines of the target system. The huge graphics of the original have been shrunken down to ensure speed and playability are not affected. This might actually be more fun to play than the coin-op.

GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

■ Chris Butler's conversion of Ghosts 'N Goblins is great, but Ste Ruddy's conversion of the sequel is even better. Much of the coin-op has made the journey intact, and Tim Follin's amazing SID soundtrack is the icing on the cake. It's as tough as hell – as it should be.

SALAMANDER

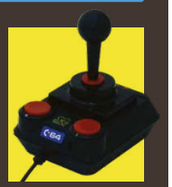
■ The C64 is home to some scintillating horizontal shooters and this conversion is among the very best of them. A couple of stages are missing, and the multi-load is a pain on tape, but this is admirably close to Konami's coin-op in terms of looks, features and playability.



SIXTY FOUR NOT OUT

MODERN DEVICES THAT KEEP THE C64 BATTING

64DTV



■ Released in 2004, the DTV (Direct-To-TV) was one of the earliest plug-and-play retro devices. Modelled on the classic Competition Pro joystick, it comes with 30 built-in games, mostly from Epyx and Hewson. If you want to add your own games you have to hack it.

THEC64

■ Superseding the 2018 Mini device, this full-sized replica from Retro Games Ltd features a functioning keyboard, making it more useful than a mere emulator-in-a-box. A total of 64 (natch) games are included and you can also load all your own software via USB.

MEGA65

■ Based on the unreleased Commodore 65 prototype, this is a modern open-source recreation of the computer conceived to bridge the gap between the C64 and the Amiga. The CPU can run 40x faster than the C64, but it's backwards compatible with C64 software.

C64 ULTIMATE

■ This premium offering from Commodore International launched last year and was well received, thanks to its FPGA-based hardware offering near-perfect compatibility with existing software and peripherals. Pictured here is the latest model based on the C64C design.

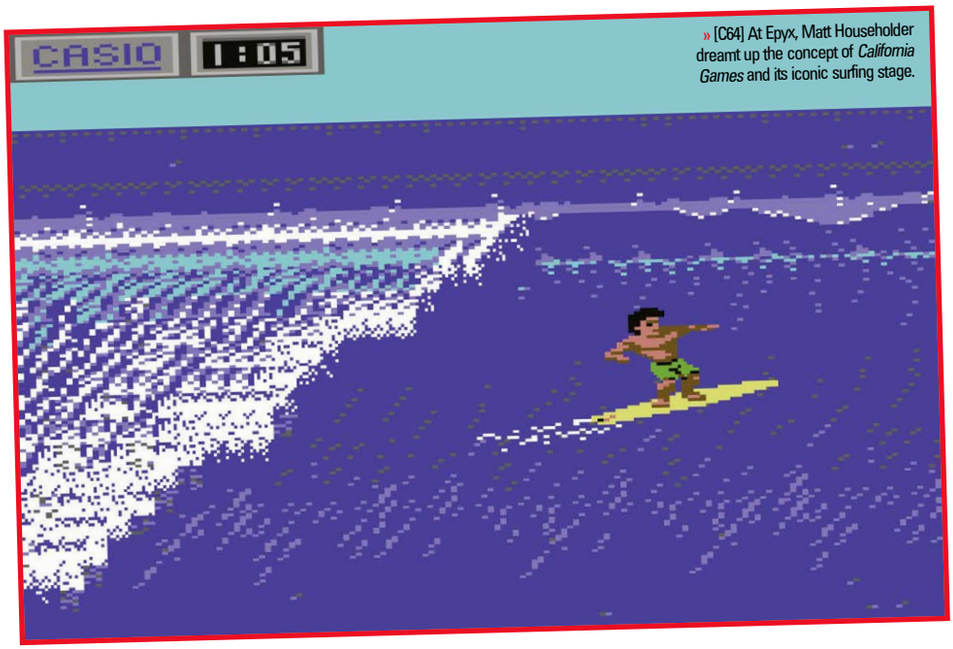
▶ The C64's commercial life was over – but we all know what happened next. Jason Mackenzie is the ideal man to talk us through the machine's hobbyist revival, having been once described as the man who single-handedly tried to save the C64. "It was seeing the big magazines like *Commodore Force* and *Commodore Format* disappearing that gave me the idea to produce my own magazine in the form of *Commodore Zone*," he says. "This was produced with the help of the brilliant and sadly missed Jason 'TMR' Kelk. I was lucky to have some awesome contacts in the C64 scene at the time like Andy Roberts, Warren Pilkington and Frank Gasking who all submitted features for our little mag that ran for 16 issues in total."

Jason also founded Psytronik Software to publish new games for the C64. "Psytronik Software came about when programmer Jon Wells was looking for a way to market his C64 conversion of *Sceptre Of Baghdad*. After some brainstorming I came up with the name Psytronik, an amalgamation of Psygnosis and Mastertronic. I did actually dabble with other systems but it was my love for the C64 that always drew me back to that system in the end."

> "THE C64 SPAWNED AN ENTIRE GENERATION OF CREATIVE PROGRAMMERS AND ARTISTS"
> **SHAHID AHMAD**

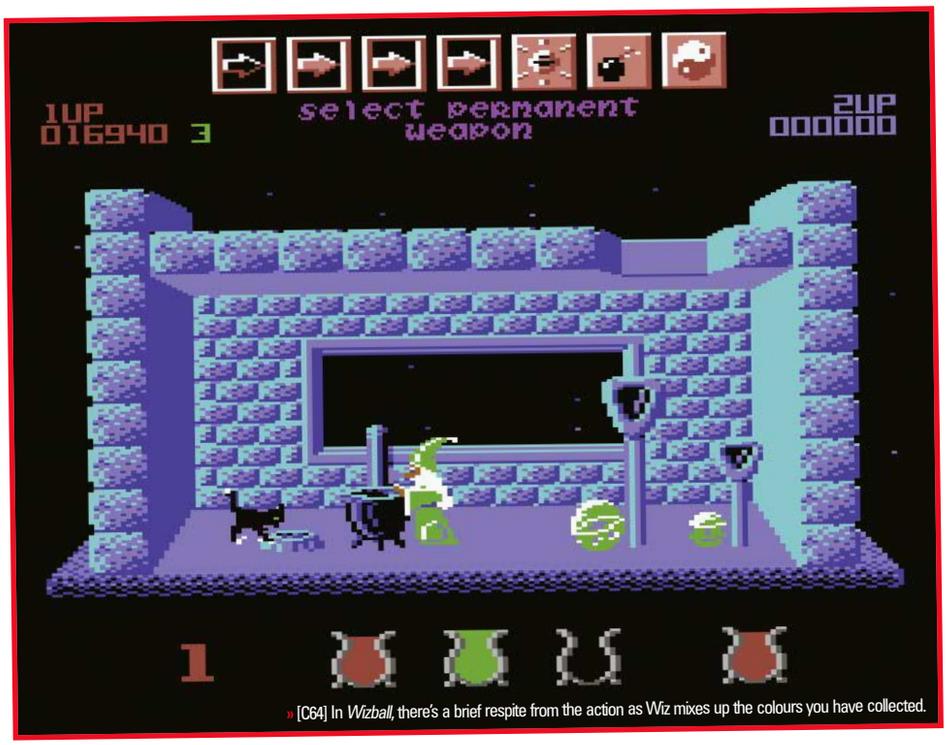
After a hiatus, Psytronik was relaunched in 2008 and Jason has published games for the C64 (and other retro systems) ever since. "The most rewarding part of publishing new games on the C64 is the satisfaction I get from putting beautifully packaged games into the hands of fans," he says, with understandable pride. "It has taken me almost 30 years of hard work to get the packaging to a standard that I am happy with. The frustrating part of supporting an older system is battling with 40-year-old technology and media. It's a nightmare trying to find useable stock of 5.25-inch floppy disks…"

Psytronik is going through a purple patch at the moment, having recently published two highly rated games from GriffonSoft (*Musketeer* and



» [C64] At Epyx, Matt Householder dreamt up the concept of *California Games* and its iconic surfing stage.

» [C64] *Delta* and its sequel *Armalyte* were two of the finest shmups released for the computer.



» [C64] In *Wizball*, there's a brief respite from the action as Wiz mixes up the colours you have collected.

» [C64] SID maestro Chris Huelsbeck composed the music for *Turrican* and its sequels.

» [C64] Released in 1993, *Mayhem In Monsterland* from Apex shows just how far C64 games progressed in the years since the machine's launch.

Sherwood) and in May this year *Impossible Mission III* from Icon64. For Jason it's a sign that the C64 scene is in a healthy place. "There are loads of new games being released or are in production, and some of them really push the limits of what is possible on the C64. Sales of Psytronik releases have skyrocketed recently. I think this is partly due to new C64s being released that are generating a lot of interest in the system."

These new C64s are courtesy of Retro Games Ltd, which has launched both mini and full-sized C64 reproductions in recent years, and more recently the revived Commodore International brand and its C64 Ultimate computer. "I love the new systems that are appearing," says Jason. "It's such a good way to bring classic systems to new users. It's also good from a publishing point of view as I can offer new games either digitally or on USB. I love the fact that there are shiny new C64s rolling off the production line in 2026."

For the final word on the C64 and its legacy, we turn back to Shahid for his thoughts on how the computer has positively impacted the computer and tech industries since its launch in 1982. "The C64 spawned an entire generation of creative programmers and artists, comfortable with constraints and willing to try all kinds of crazy ideas to bring the impossible to life," he reflects. "This wasn't just graphically or technically, but sonically too. The C64 struck an almost impossible balance through its clever combination of hardware components, allowing for the creation of games that were ahead of their time, looking and sounding like something from the future.

"It's not just nostalgia, because the constraints of the C64 also served to spark creativity in a way that perhaps only the Amiga matched. But given how inexpensive the C64 was, its accessibility made it stand out. It was seminal. Its impact can't be overstated." ✱

THE COMMODORE 64GS (GREAT SHAME)

REMEMBER THAT TIME COMMODORE TURNED THE C64 INTO A CONSOLE?

A sometimes overlooked feature of the C64 is its rear cartridge slot. Technically this is an expansion port, capable of accepting a range of add-ons, but in the early days a surprising number of games were released in cartridge format. While the cartridges offered instant, trouble-free loading, they were more expensive to produce and therefore priced higher than games on tape and disk. In addition, the size of the cartridge ROMs were generally limited, restricting the type of games that could be offered.

Cartridges would make a comeback in 1990 when Commodore unveiled the C64GS (Games System). This low-cost device was basically a 'consolised' C64, with no keyboard and no ports for connecting a disk drive or tape recorder. On the plus side, the cartridge technology had improved by this point, allowing for larger games to be stored. To emphasise this, the GS came bundled with a cartridge containing four full games – the crusty old kickabout *International Football* and three newer titles: *Klax*, *Flimbo's Quest* and *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O' Fun*. Publishers like Ocean, Domark and System 3 produced a few new cartridges, typically retailing for around £20 each. Many more releases were promised but never materialised. You could load up the older cartridges, but these were designed for the C64 and many required the use of the keyboard, so were unplayable on the GS. The C64, meanwhile, could run any cartridge, old or new.

Despite the GS being cheaper than the C64 (£99 versus £159 at the time), the C64 represented far better value and as such the console was a sales disaster. It's estimated that only around 20,000 units were sold, making it an unfortunate footnote in the C64's story.

» The 64GS console failed miserably in its bid to keep Sega and Nintendo awake at night.

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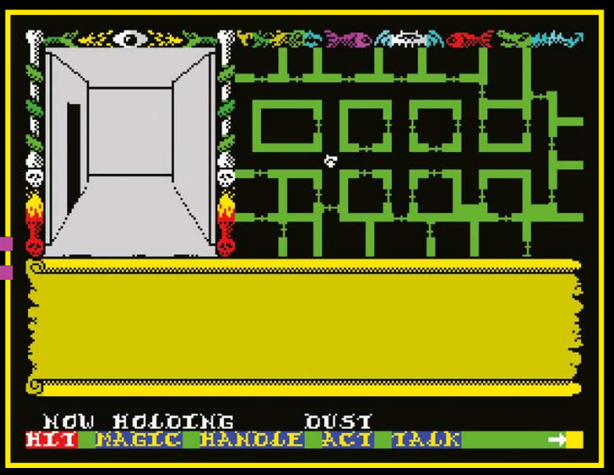
THE MAKING OF Swords & Sorcery

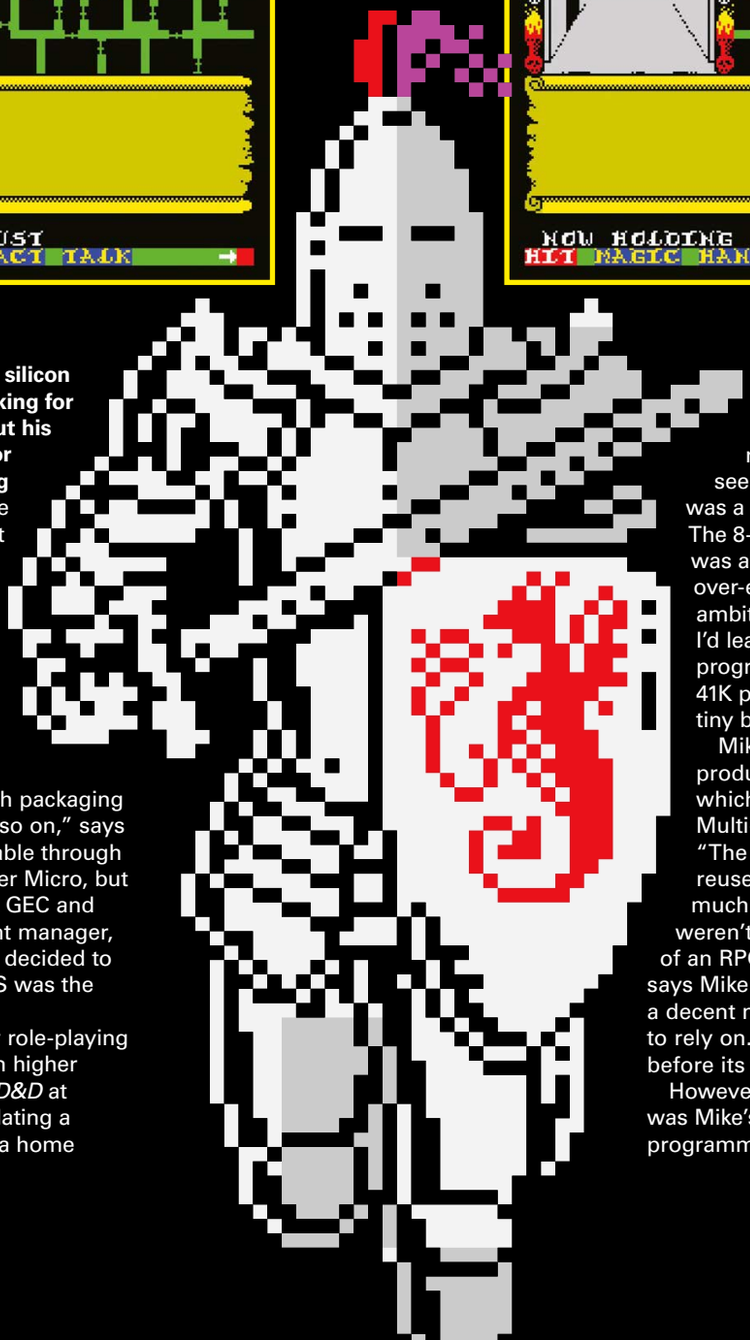
IN THE MID-EIGHTIES, COVENTRY-BASED PUBLISHER PSS RELEASED A NEW GAME FOR THE ZX SPECTRUM AND AMSTRAD CPC WHICH AIMED AT BEING THE CLOSEST EXPERIENCE TO A REAL RPG EVER SEEN ON A HOME COMPUTER. THIS IS THE STORY OF THAT GAME

WORDS BY RICHARD C HEWISON

» [ZX Spectrum] Sensing a pit and having the good sense to avoid it are two very different things!



» [ZX Spectrum] Starting your quest for Zob's armour in the ZX Spectrum version.



Mike Simpson was a silicon chip designer, working for GEC in Coventry but his real passion was for fantasy role-playing games. The emergence of home computers gave him the perfect opportunity to try and mesh his passion for technology and RPGs together. "One of my GEC colleagues and flatmate, Campbell McCausland wrote a game on the ZX81 called *The Gauntlet*, an excellent reimagining in blocky graphics of the arcade machine *Scramble*. I helped with packaging art and duplicating copies, and so on," says Mike. The game was only available through one shop in London called Buffer Micro, but it sold very well. "Campbell left GEC and joined PSS as their development manager, and they republished it. When I decided to quit my job to write games, PSS was the obvious choice of publisher."

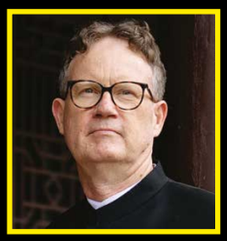
Mike's enthusiasm for fantasy role-playing games was stoked by his stint in higher education. "I had been playing *D&D* at university, and the idea of translating a *D&D*-style dungeon crawl onto a home computer in some way was irresistible. Making an 8-bit game engine that could be reused to make complex RPGs seemed like a good idea at the time. It was a good idea, but at the wrong time. The 8-bit era was too short for that. It was also over-ambitious and massively over-engineered to achieve my ambitions. I tried to cram everything I'd learned at university about programming and playing *D&D* into a 41K program, which is unimaginably tiny by today's standards."

Mike developed a program for producing multiple campaign modules which became known as MIDAS, the Multi-Dimensional Animation System. "The game system was made with reuse in mind, but I doubt that helped much in selling it to PSS. Sequels weren't really a thing yet, and the idea of an RPG game engine was unproven," says Mike. "It probably seemed more like a decent marketing hook than something to rely on. It was a bit premature and well before its time."

However, the first stumbling block was Mike's lack of experience in games programming on home micros. "When I

PAUL HUTCHINSON

■ After completing the Amstrad CPC conversion, Paul left PSS and created the Amstrad CPC versions of *Druid* and *Gothik* for Firebird Software.



MIKE SIMPSON

■ After Mirrorsoft, Mike worked for Psygnosis and set up its London Camden office. He later joined Tim Ansel to establish the development team Creative Assembly.

» [ZX Spectrum] About to enter a monstrous melee with the malevolent Medusa!

» [Amstrad CPC] There's only one way to find out what's inside the chest!

NOW HOLDING SWORD
HAVE PITY O HIGH SILVER ROBED
MAGICIAN
HAVE PITY O BROWN LEGS ELSE I WILL
EMPTY YOUR CHEST
HIT MAGIC HANDLE ACT TALK USE

» [Amstrad CPC] Pleading for mercy whilst also subtly insulting a wizard is common practice in Swords & Sorcery.

started, I was still fresh out of university, and I knew less about how to make games than the average player does now. There was nothing to read about it, and only a short history of games to play through and see what had been done well or badly."

> **"THE GAME SYSTEM WAS MADE WITH REUSE IN MIND"**
> **MIKE SIMPSON**

Paul Hutchinson was a young local programmer working for PSS at the time Mike was formulating his game idea, as Paul recalls. "I worked full time in the office on Stoney Stanton Road in Coventry. I first met Mike when he came in to discuss *Swords & Sorcery* with the management. Occasionally, he would do work at the office, but he was mostly off-site."

Mike's program featured a real-time operating system with a round-robin scheduler and dispatcher, six foreground and two background processes which allowed different modules including first-person 3D display, map, UI, scripts, text processing and so on to run independently at different framerates. It also had an interpreted scripting language driving much of the gameplay, and all the game data was stored in a database with a single access function. Text was tokenised in a dictionary, and characters in the dictionary were compressed into a Huffman-style nibble stream. All of this was built using a macro assembler. "It took two days to assemble and link a build, and bugs were fixed by scribbling on a printout or patch pad, hand-coding the corrections and using a hex editor to insert them. Every couple of weeks the source code was updated with a couple of hundred edits, and a new build made," recalls Mike incredulously. "All this code was intricately engineered, highly optimised and quite beautiful. I still have a printout of it to this day!"

The control system that Mike eventually implemented for *Swords & Sorcery* took some getting used to. The left hand would hover over the 1, 2, 3 keys that controlled movement (rotation and forward motion), whilst the right hand used 8, 9, 0 to navigate and select the various actions chosen from the menu system. The player could choose to dive straight in with the ▶

» Mike's printout of *Swords & Sorcery*'s ZX Spectrum source code in all its glory.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** PERSONAL SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS (PSS)
- **DEVELOPER:** MIKE SIMPSON, PAUL HUTCHINSON
- **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **GENRE:** RPG

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

AUSTERLITZ
PLATFORM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC
RELEASED: 1989

MICROCOSM
PLATFORM: PC, CD32, SEGA CD, 3DO
RELEASED: 1993

TOTAL WAR SERIES (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PC
RELEASED: 2000 - 2023

default character Flubbit The Dull, or name and then train a new one. Training would define the character's abilities over a 14-day period, choosing a different master each day from a pool of 12, learning new skills from each one. Having been trained, the player would then buy their equipment before starting the game in earnest. The provided manual deliberately avoided explaining the capabilities of each master, which meant the player had to work it out as they went along.

As the adventure unfolded, the various monsters and characters encountered would address the player using terms that indicated the player's current rank of competence in fighting, spell casting and so on. The main action would involve combat, negotiations, pit avoidance and collecting items, with various messages, stats and other information updating on-screen at a furious rate during combat. Adeptly finding and selecting the right menu option at the right moment was the key to succeeding.

Whilst Mike busied himself with the main bulk of the game code, back in the PSS office, Paul Hutchinson was assigned a variety of other related tasks. "I worked on the main display window, the rendering, and so on. I also did most of the graphics, including the loading screen with the dragon and the gold, and I put the font together, and made it all look pretty."

Unfortunately, the scheduled nine-month development timetable agreed with PSS stretched out to a torturous eighteen months. "Conversing with enemies was innovative, but it was expensive, crippled by lack of memory, and added little to gameplay," admits Mike. "Did I really need to allow freely putting items inside other items? A sword in a bag in a bag in a box in a chest? It was difficult to code and was an invitation for players to break the game and it didn't add anything. There are plenty of other things to add to the list. I was self-indulgently having fun writing clever code, and digging a deep, deep hole when it came to getting it finished!"

» [ZX Spectrum] Approaching an altar after defeating a monster might just alter your entire approach!

» [ZX Spectrum] Hurling insults that William Shakespeare would be proud of at a brave Knight.

A caveat in the printed manual hinted that the ZX Spectrum 48K version was released with problems intact. "Due to the enormous complexity and nature of *Swords & Sorcery*, PSS cannot guarantee that all errors have been removed. If any fault does occur then please contact us, taking note of the location and nature of the problem, in order that we may correct future versions." It was quite telling that other PSS releases from the same year did not include any similar statements. Perhaps the most significant bug left in the released game was the one that prevented players from finding the final piece of Zob's armour, making the game unfinishable. "Shortage of memory made the game map quite small, which meant the difficulty curve was steep. It was not easy to complete the game, and that made testing difficult," says Mike. "Even more so towards the end, where months of working 14-hour days, seven days a week, were taking their toll. In the final version there was a single-bit error in the data for the last item, and it couldn't be picked up."

"IT WAS A GOOD IDEA, BUT AT THE WRONG TIME"
MIKE SIMPSON

When copies of the game were sent out to the magazines for reviewing, PSS sent with them a small booklet which contained information that presumably would favour a positive review in return. The booklet stated from the outset, "These hints are not intended for either publication or general circulation. They are intended to help reviewers understand and evaluate the system as fully as possible in the limited time available to them," which might be seen as an attempt to smooth over the ▶

IN FINE COMPANY

WHAT OTHER RPGS COULD ZX SPECTRUM OWNERS PLAY?

THE ORACLE'S CAVE

An early game from the short-lived publisher Doric Computer Services that was a simplistic fight and collect game that also featured RPG-style stats that campaigners could enjoy. It debuted on the ZX81 first, but the later ZX Spectrum version featured much improved character graphics.

Bard's Tale
You face death itself, in the form of: 1 Thief.
Will your stalwart band (F)ight or (R)un?
Thief
Character Name AC Hits Cond SpPt Cl
1) BRIAN THE FIST 3 30 30 0 Pa
2) EL CID 2 20 20 0 Ba
3) SAMSON 3 28 28 0 Wa
4) MARKUS 4 24 24 0 Ro
5) MERLIN 9 16 16 20 Co
6) OMAR 9 20 20 14 Ma

THE BARD'S TALE

EA's mid-Eighties classic was converted to almost every home-computer format. Whilst only offering monochromatic pictures, the ZX Spectrum version was otherwise a solid if not particularly innovative, menu-driven role-playing experience that offered a few extra images if played on the disk-based +3 version.

TIMES OF LORE

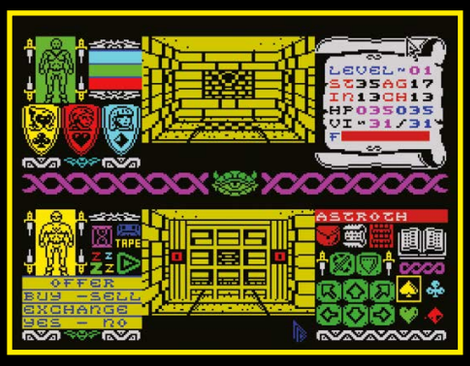
Origin Software's RPG adventure game was competently converted to the ZX Spectrum, featuring real-time exploration in a *Gauntlet*-style overhead view, with pop-up menus and an icon-driven system that gave the player temporary respite and time to think about their next action.

» The artwork for the abandoned sequel *Heroquest* was reused for the PSS game *Sorcerer Lord*.

» [ZX Spectrum] Suffering the consequences of falling into a perilous pit trap.

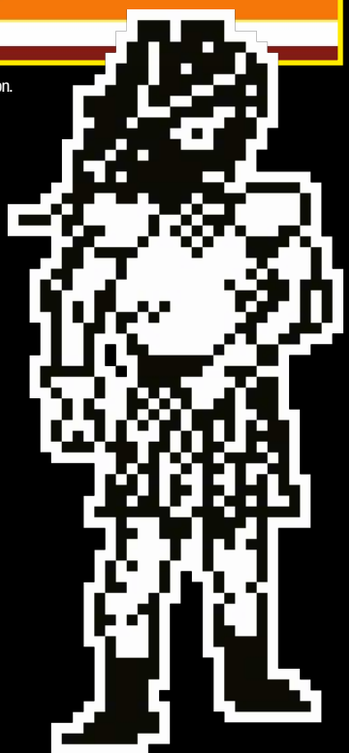
» The entire menagerie of foes to face in *Swords & Sorcery*.

» [Amstrad CPC] Preparing to battle a skeleton to the death on the CPC version.



BLOODWYCH

■ This 16-bit simultaneous real-time two-player dungeon romp had no right to be as good on the ZX Spectrum. With a few necessary but minor gameplay sacrifices, the Spectrum version was otherwise excellent. The only slight drawback was the difficulty in spotting small items on the dungeon floor.



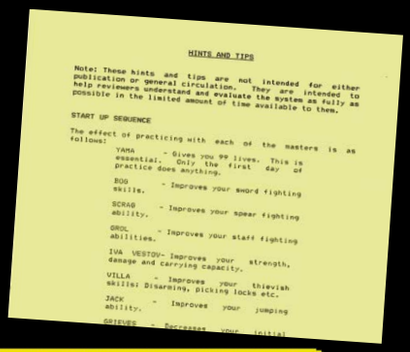
MISSING IN ACTION

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHER CONVERSIONS OF SWORDS & SORCERY?

■ Magazine adverts from 1986 mentioned that a Commodore 64 version was coming soon, but that was never on the cards. "The game sold well enough but failed to make the publisher a good return or fully satisfy the players," says Mike Simpson wistfully. "And it was flawed in so many ways that it wasn't obvious a sequel or a port to the Commodore 64 even with significant improvements would do much better at the tail end of the 8-bit era. We played around with several ideas but in the end none of them were strong enough".

However, North American publisher Datasoft licensed several strategy titles from PSS for release in the US, including mention of Atari XL/XE, Commodore 64 and Apple II versions of *Swords & Sorcery*, which was the most expensive of all the announced PSS titles, priced at $29.95. The fact that nothing was ever previewed for those formats strongly suggests that nothing ever came of it. Mike Simpson was still working for PSS at the time of that deal, so if conversions had been started, he would have known about it. A typical case of wishful thinking rather than actual reality, which could be considered ironic when one of Datasoft's biggest sellers in the US was the game *Alternate Reality*.

» [ZX Spectrum] Despite PSS saying otherwise, *Swords & Sorcery* only came out on the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC.


HINTS AND TIPS

Note: These hints and tips are not intended for either publication or general circulation. They are intended to help reviewers understand and evaluate the system as fully as possible in the limited amount of time available to them.

START UP SEQUENCE

The effect of practicing with each of the masters is as follows:

YAMA - Gives you 99 lives. This is essential. Only the first day of practice does anything.

BOG - Improves your sword fighting skills.

SCRAG - Improves your spear fighting ability.

GROL - Improves your staff fighting abilities.

IVA VESTOV- Improves your strength, damage and carrying capacity.

VILLA - Improves your thievish skills: Disarming, picking locks etc.

JACK - Improves your jumping ability.

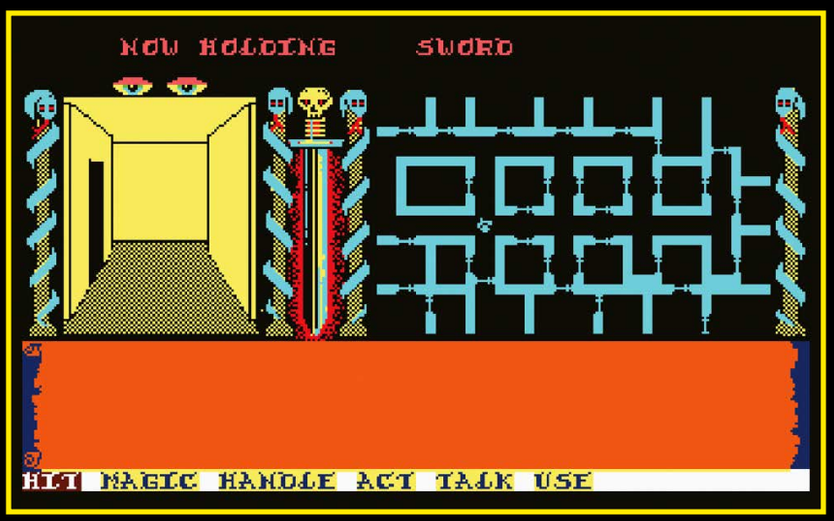
» PSS sent out hints and tips to magazine reviewers to help them make progress.

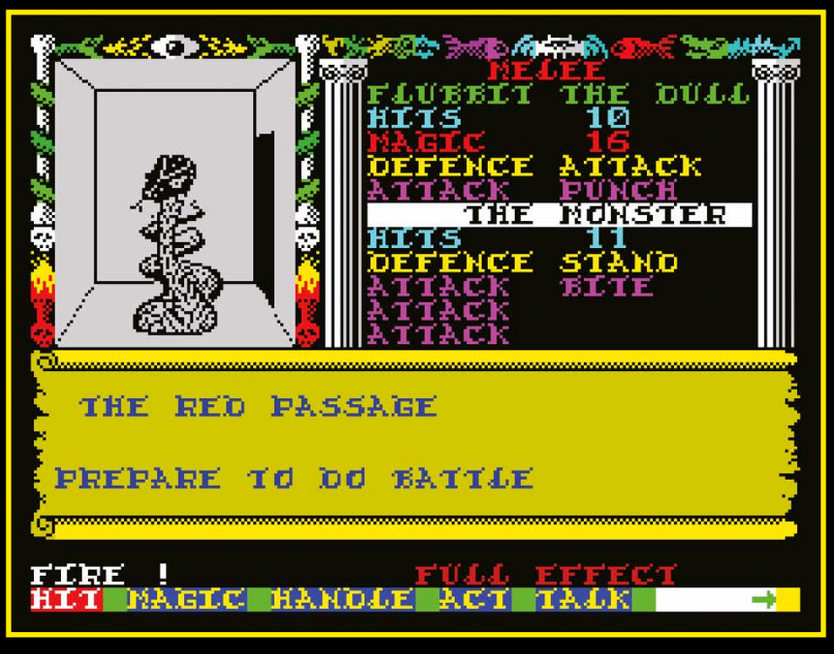
A WINNING CONCEPT?

THAT TIME WHEN A UNIQUE AWARD WAS BESTOWED

■ A curious prize was awarded to *Swords & Sorcery* by Newsfield, publishers of *Zzap!64*, *Crash* and *Amtix* magazines. Newsfield saw fit to give Mike Simpson and PSS the Best Game Concept 1985 award. What makes the award interesting is that it was unique, never having been given out before or since, which makes the whole thing sound a little suspect. "The award was genuine as far as I know," says Mike . "I was definitely pleased to receive it at the time, and I don't think it could have been just a publicity stunt." On publication the game was given a coveted Crash Smash!, an Amtix Accolade and *Computer & Video Games* announced it as its Game Of The Month. However, it wasn't as well received by the public, who felt it lacked atmosphere, wandering through an environment that looked more like a bland hotel corridor with doors leading to rooms. However, the accolades and awards allowed PSS to finally update the magazine advert which had been appearing since late-1984 in time for the release of the Amstrad CPC conversion in 1986. At that point, PSS were still teasing a Commodore 64 version to be available.

» [ZX Spectrum] Zapping a wizard in the midst of an epic magic spell battle!





difficulty that reviewers and players faced from the moment the game started.

An Amstrad CPC conversion followed in early 1986. "I recall doing most of the CPC version, although Mike's Z80 code from the ZX Spectrum version was driving the bulk of it," explains Paul. "It was the screen and sound where my conversion work was necessary."

PSS hinted that an expansion module for *Swords & Sorcery* would be released in 1986, adding a feature that allowed two players to link their ZX Spectrums together to have a joint adventure. The plan was then to release a couple more modules for the first adventure, before unleashing two expansions called *The Village* and *The Arena*, mentioned in the game manual. The former would have allowed the player to improve their character's equipment outside the dungeon, whilst the latter let them battle against another player's character to improve their fighting abilities.

» [ZX Spectrum] Tooling up before embarking on your quest to recover Zob's armour.

Mike's intentions for *Swords & Sorcery* were ambitious, and his determination to produce a solid RPG game on the humble 48K ZX Spectrum must be admired. Unfortunately, the finished game fell short, and the reality of having released a below par game weighed heavily on his shoulders. However, Mike did make amends by personally replying to people who wrote letters to PSS pointing out the bugs, and he supplied a BASIC program listing that players could type in and save, which would then patch a character save file to allow the game to be completed and fix some of the issues. Mike was also honest and open regarding the extra modules, as he explained in one of his letters. "The two years developing the MIDAS system was a great drain on my resources and commercial necessity forces me to abandon work on all the extra modules."

Work on the first of the new modules had started, and Mike also revealed that rather than release it as a module for the first game, it was going to be redeveloped into a separate product, which PSS initially announced as *Advanced Swords & Sorcery* before revealing it to be a sequel advertised as *Heroquest*. Unfortunately, that game never came to fruition either. It was going to be set inside an evil wizard's castle and include much improved conversation options and nine quests to complete with a map twice the size of the original game. The sequel had the player infiltrating the castle using bribery or good old-fashioned combat. Once inside, more traps, weapons and monsters would be encountered. Another game from PSS called *Poltergeist* was also earmarked to use MIDAS, but that game also failed to appear.

> "I WAS SELF-INDULGENTLY HAVING FUN WRITING CLEVER CODE"
> MIKE SIMPSON

Swords & Sorcery might not have achieved what Mike or PSS had hoped for, but reaching for the unobtainable is sometimes what creative people need to be creative. It's better to have aimed and missed, than to have never aimed at all. However, the cost and continued delays in getting *Swords & Sorcery* published was one of the contributing factors leading to the PSS owners deciding to call it a day and sell the company to the Mirror Group in 1987, as the late Gary Mays explained to The Games That Weren't website in 2016. "The endless delays in the release of the Z80 versions cost PSS a small fortune and we frankly lost heart as well as money."

With the benefit of hindsight, Mike ponders what might have been had he held back for a few years to allow the available home technology to catch up with his vision. "By the time I finished, 16-bit hardware was beginning to emerge. I would have done better to wait for the Amiga, which had more than ten times the memory, cut the feature set to the core fun bits, and make a content-rich, more focussed game with a decent UI and an easier difficulty curve. FTL got to exactly that spot with *Dungeon Master* a couple of years later, with spectacular results."

Mike Simpson remained with the new owners of PSS and became development manager at The Development Company in Coventry, formerly the PSS office. *Swords & Sorcery* was fated to be Mike's one and only programmed game, although he did contribute campaign AI code to games in the *Total War* series much later. Instead, Mike took on managerial responsibilities but remained active in game design. Indeed, what Mike had hoped to achieve with *Swords & Sorcery* was instead present in *Bloodwych*, written and designed by Anthony Taglione and Pete James, with the lead Amiga and Atari ST versions being project managed by Mike for Mirrorsoft via its Image Works publishing label in 1989. *Bloodwych* could be considered the spiritual successor to what *Swords & Sorcery* was trying to achieve four years earlier, especially when looking at the 8-bit conversions that followed later. ★

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Bubble Bobble

SIMPLE FUN FOR EVERYONE

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1988 » TAITO

About a decade or so back I was walking down Poole high street looking for things to spend my birthday money on. With the kids in tow, we trawled around all my favourite shops, from HMV and CEX to Game and GameStation (I'm a man of very simple tastes). When we got to GameStation there was a huge number of Master System games on the counter, close to 30 and they were all priced at £1 to £2.

Anyone else might have carefully gone through the pile to check the condition of the games and what was actually included, but I simply moved the entire collection across to one of the guys behind the counter and said, "I'll take the lot." As the games got bagged up I instantly had regrets because I noticed a few crappy titles in the mix, but I also saw the likes of *The NewZealand Story*, *Ms Pac-Man*, *Castle Of Illusion* and *Operation Wolf*, so that moment of doubt quickly faded.

Once we got home my youngest daughter Alice became very interested in the games, particularly *The NewZealand Story*, *Ms Pac-Man* and the original *Wonder Boy*. It was *Bubble Bobble* though that really caught her attention, so much so that she recently told me it's her favourite game of all time. Initially I thought her fondness for the game came from us playing it together on the Master System, but it goes back to when she was a child (probably about five) and she used to play it on my tabletop MAME cabinet that was in our front room. "I don't know why, I just really like the game," she told me recently. "I like its simplicity, its colours, the fact you can play it with two buttons and the music. Bouncing on bubbles is fun too and I really like *Bubble Symphony* as well."

It's a real testament to Taito's game that after 40 years *Bubble Bobble* is still picking up new fans. It also probably explains why the Taito edition of the Super Pocket mysteriously disappeared from my shed recently. ✱

» The Automata team pictured in 1980, with founder Mel Croucher seated.

THE GAME PUBLISHING PIONEERS

GAMING IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY, BUT IN THE EARLY EIGHTIES IT WAS A NICHE HOBBY, WITH BEDROOM CODERS SELLING GAMES VIA MAIL ORDER TO A TINY AUDIENCE. WE SPEAK WITH PIONEERING PUBLISHERS WHO BROUGHT GAMES OUT FROM THE FRINGES AND INTO THE HIGH STREETS

WORDS BY SHAUN MCCLURE

Invited to our roundtable are three trailblazers who helped kickstart the UK games industry: Mel Croucher of Automata UK, Tony Baden of Bug-Byte, and Giles Hunter of CDS Microsystems. Our in-depth chat focusses on those heady early Eighties years and covers everything from advertising their existence and sourcing new software, to dealing with distributors and operating in a rapidly changing market. We begin at the beginning, with the origins of each company.

Can you start by telling us how your gaming businesses come into being?

Mel Croucher: Two things came together in 1977. We were already in business, producing cassette-based travel guides that you played in your car, and we had our own tape duplication machines. These travel guides were a pain in the arse, as they involved travel, and getting the advertising to keep them viable. We also had a show on Radio Victory in Portsmouth. Home computers were appearing, and their programs were stored on cassettes. Our show included a late-night section where we would broadcast a computer program that people could record and load into their computers.

We could duplicate cassettes. See the connection? I thought, let's give this thing a try! We bought a ZX81, and I roped some colleagues into doing the coding. *Can Of Worms* – a 1KB games pack for the ZX81, full of schoolboy smut – was our first successful title.

Tony Baden: I had purchased and assembled a ZX80 and, being very pleased with my soldering work, asked two of my student colleagues what I could do with it, as it came with no programs. I had no experience of programming, but they had both done a bit at school. So, between us, we started writing simple games. We used to go to the pub, have a few pints, then come back and do some programming. One day I said, "Why don't we try to sell these, as others must be in the same boat, having built their ZX80 and having no software for it."

So, in May 1980, Bug-Byte was born, and a small advert was sent off to *Electronics Today* magazine. The first cassette was called, rather uninspiringly, *Program Pack 1*, and after a good few months of sales came a few more adverts and *Program Pack 2*. Things then moved onto the ZX81.

Giles Hunter: I actually started as a retail manager for WHSmith, and we had an exclusivity deal with Sinclair to stock the ZX81 and then the Spectrum for six months before other retailers got their hands on them. It was obvious that before long we would need software to go along with these computers.

A couple of our customers, Ian Williams and Carol Howlett, had their own mail-order games company – CDS Micro Systems – and

» Mel Croucher (left) and Christian Penfold pictured at a London Microfair in 1982.

I was instrumental in getting them a deal with WHSmith to stock its titles in our stores. I was then offered a job by them, as they needed a general manager to look after the day-to-day aspects of running the business so that they could concentrate on development, which I accepted. The job came with a Porsche. How could I refuse? Their first two games were *Castle Blackstar*, a text adventure, and *Leapfrog*, a *Frogger* clone.

> "WE NEARLY ALWAYS CAME HOME WITH BAGS FULL OF CASH. FUCKING BRILLIANT IT WAS!"
> MEL CROUCHER

How did you go about making people aware of your games?

TB: After the initial adverts, we reinvested money into bigger and better adverts, including in *Personal Computer World* and the newly developing home-computer press. This generated more sales, which had a big impact on revenue, allowing us to increase advertising further.

We also attended the very first Sinclair Microfair at Central Hall in Westminster. We took a box of 200 cassettes and sold them all in about an hour!

» Bug-Byte cofounder Tony Baden looking sharp back in 1984.

MC: We were almost fully mail order, and advertising was key. But we never paid for advertising… instead, we created comic strips and other 'content' which we gave away for free. We provided entertainment first and integrated the advertising into that. We had free pages in many of the early computer magazines as a result.

The Microfairs were pivotal to us, and to the industry. Without Mike Johnson organising those, I don't think the gaming industry would have taken off quite so soon. We used to turn up with a car full of cassettes and sell them all. We never paid for a stand either – we would often bring a band and provide music, or turn the stand into a pub and give beer away. We nearly always came home with bags full of cash. Fucking brilliant it was!

» The first multimedia game, *Deus Ex Machina* featured an all-star musical narrative on the b-side.

THE INNOVATORS

INTRODUCING OUR INTERVIEWEES

MEL CROUCHER

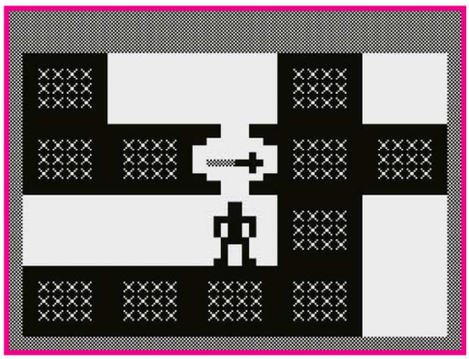
■ Founder of the software publisher Automata, and the brains behind classic games *Pimania* and *Deus Ex Machina*.

TONY BADEN

■ Cofounder of Bug-Byte (along with Tony Milner), whose hits included *Manic Miner* and *Twin Kingdom Valley*.

GILES HUNTER

■ CEO of CDS Micro Systems, and budget label Blue Ribbon. Hits included *Steve Davis Snooker* and *Colossus Chess*.



» [ZX81] *Mazogs* was the first big hit for Bug-Byte, written by Don Priestley.

BEDROOMS TO BOARDROOMS

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS NOTHING. THEN THE BEDROOM CODERS CAME ALONG…

The evolution of the first small computer games companies all followed a similar path. One of the early 8-bit home computers is purchased, and after learning how to program it, the owner realises they may have made a game that others would wish to play… and buy! Software for their machines is scarce and an idea for a part-time business takes hold.

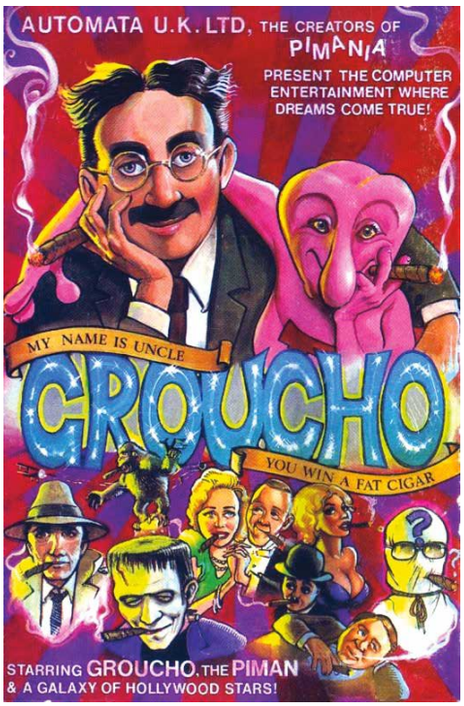
Money is scraped together to place a small advert in one of the fledgling computing or electronics magazines for their game. This advert generates surprisingly strong sales. Tapes are duplicated individually using tape-to-tape machines, and posted out by hand in little padded envelopes. The profits are used to place bigger adverts, and the cycle of growth continues.

As the computing industry expands, home computers become mainstream, and suddenly the company is at a crossroads… change or die! Changing meant becoming a more professional outfit with premises and large-scale cassette duplicating facilities. This created greater financial risk, as they were no longer selling to demand.

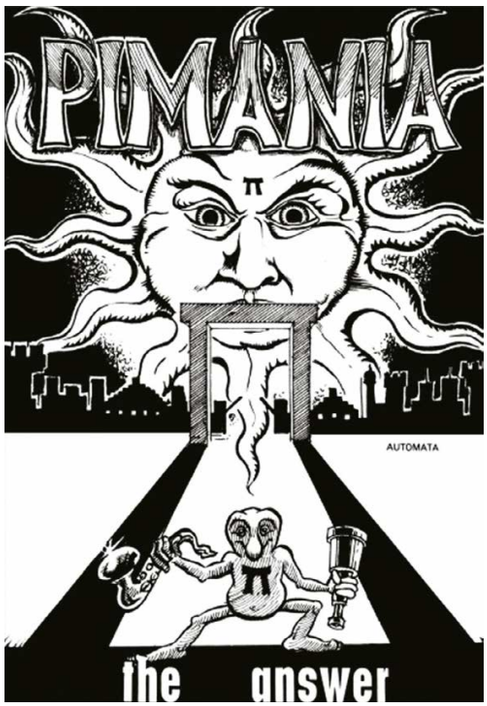
You are reading this article today because of those companies that took that risk, bringing a brand-new form of entertainment to the masses.

THE INVASION HAS BEGUN
The assault on your senses has begun with a great choice of games that have been created to give you a real challenge!
ARCADIA
SCHIZOIDS
WACKY WAITERS
£5.50
...the name of the game

» Invasion! Some early commercial titles begin to appear, courtesy of Imagine Software.


AUTOMATA U.K. LTD, THE CREATORS OF PIMANIA
PRESENT THE COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE!
MY NAME IS UNCLE
GROUCHO
YOU WIN A FAT CIGAR
STARRING GROUCHO, THE PIMAN & A GALAXY OF HOLLYWOOD STARS!

» Automata's quirky titles stood out with cover art by Robin Grenville-Evans.



» Automata's *Pimania* was the first game to offer a prize to the first person to complete it.

GH: In the early days, CDS, like everyone else, were selling by mail order, which had changed by the time I joined. They still advertised in computing magazines, but that part of the business was getting much smaller, and less reliant on advertising. I have to mirror Mel's views about Microfairs too. They were absolutely brilliant for cash flow.

In those early days, how did you handle the duplication and printing of your cassettes and covers?

TB: At the start, we were just doing individual tapes direct from the computer. Later, we got a tape-to-tape machine, then set up a bank of five cassette recorders to do five at once. This wasn't enough, so we started to use commercial tape duplication companies. However, this didn't give us sufficient control over production in what was becoming a seasonal market, so we decided to set up our own – but separate – duplication company, Spool Ltd. This was set up in the same building we moved to, Mulberry House in Liverpool, which also housed our printers, who produced the cassette inserts and other promotional material.

> "AT THE START, WE WERE JUST DOING INDIVIDUAL TAPES DIRECT FROM THE COMPUTER. LATER, WE GOT A TAPE-TO-TAPE MACHINE, THEN SET UP A BANK OF FIVE CASSETTE RECORDERS TO DO FIVE AT ONCE"
> **TONY BADEN**

GH: Similarly, one of the reasons I was taken on at CDS was to help with ramping up production. Ian and Carol had been operating on a very small scale, self-duplicating tapes on home tape-to-tape machines to order, but we started to use professional cassette duplicators which had a minimum run of 1,000 copies. This brought its own problems, as small independent stores usually ordered 20 or 30 copies at a time, so we either had no stock or too much stock of our titles. One of the first things I did when I was in sole charge was purchase our own duplicating machines and cover printing facilities. This gave us much greater flexibility and meant we could never run out of stock.

MC: We had our own duplicating machine too, that could copy to six cassettes in seconds. Whizz! There's nothing better than putting a completed cassette into a jiffy bag and going down to the post office with a huge sack and saying, "There you go!"

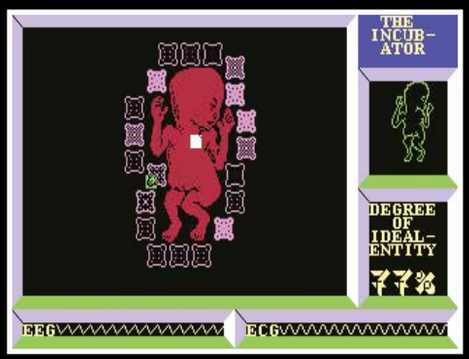
How common was it to receive a fully publishable game, randomly through your letter box?

GH: It was the days when a completed title would often land on your doormat from a bedroom coder. Some of our biggest hits came to us that way. *Pool*, by Mike Lamb, was one of these. He would go on to work on *Winged Warlords* for us, and later *Steve Davis Snooker*. He went on to Ocean and coded *RoboCop*, *Batman* and many others. *Colossus Chess* was also posted to us, and iterations of it sold well over many years.

TB: We started to receive submissions from freelance programmers, some of which were good to go and others needed further

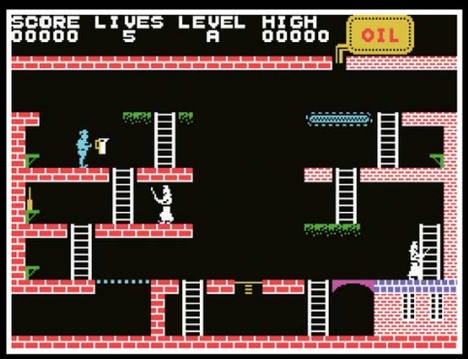
AUTOMATA FOR THE PEOPLE

A QUICK LOOK AT OUR PIONEERS' SOFTWARE HOUSES



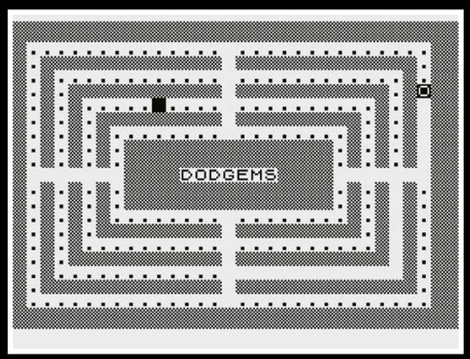
AUTOMATA UK

■ Founded by Mel Croucher in 1977 and later joined by Christian Penfold, Automata initially published audio travel guides. Mel purchased a ZX81 and the pair began publishing titles – their first big success being *Can Of Worms*. Known for its quirky titles, *Pimania* and *Deux Ex Machina* followed.



BUG-BYTE SOFTWARE

■ Founded in Liverpool in 1980 by university friends Tony Baden and Tony Milner, its first big hit was *Mazogs* on the ZX81. Bug-Byte became industry giants across many formats, and other notable titles included *Manic Miner*, *The Birds And The Bees* and *Twin Kingdom Valley*.



COS MICRO SYSTEMS

■ Founded in Doncaster as a mail-order business in 1980, Giles Hunter was brought in to expand into retail sales. Giles bought out the company in 1985 and added the Blue Ribbon budget label. The company had a string of successes which included *Steve Davis Snooker*.

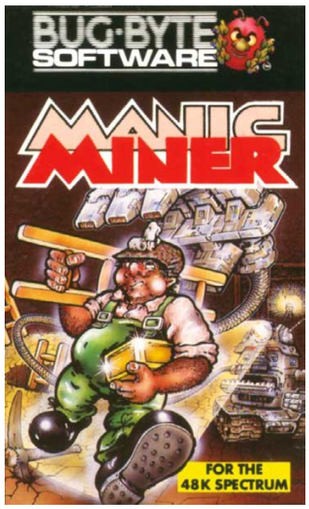
development. Some of the better-known ones were *Mazogs* by Don Priestly, on the ZX81, and *Styx* by Matthew Smith, for the Spectrum. *Styx* wasn't a great game, but his next one, *Manic Miner*, was wonderful, and we could see the potential immediately. That sold amazingly well and boosted the company considerably. He left six months later to join Software Projects.

Trevor Hall sent us an almost finished copy of *Twin Kingdom Valley*, which, when completed, was another big-selling title. We also expanded our range of titles to include those for other home computers such as the Acorn Atom, BBC Micro, Commodore VIC-20 and later the Commodore 64.

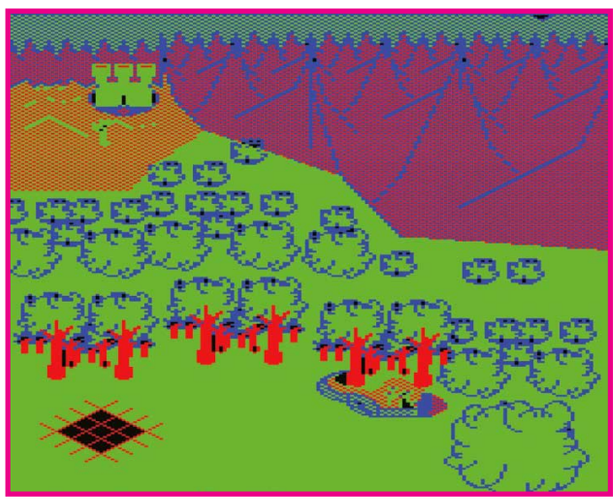
MC: Jas Austin, who continues to work in the industry, was one who turned up on the doorstep with a game. He looked like Harry Potter at the time but is now a spectacularly pierced goth. He brought us *Pi-Balled*, which was a *Q*bert* clone released on the Spectrum. But for the most part we used our own coders. Our games usually didn't fit the 'norm', and we had a policy of only publishing non-violent games.

When did you expand towards having your own coding team?

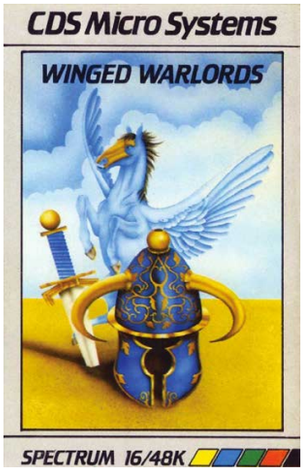
TB: We always had some level of in-house programming. It gave us greater control over output instead of relying on the random nature of submitted games. In the early days, we had a small team that once included Dave Lawson and Eugene Evans, both later of Imagine, and Trevor Hall as head programmer. We also gave freelancers specific briefs rather than relying too heavily on unsolicited submissions. We were careful to not over-expand our development team, as they are very expensive to maintain. ▶



» [ZX Spectrum] Matthew Smith's legendary *Manic Miner* was first published by Bug-Byte in 1983.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Twin Kingdom Valley* used procedural processes to create location graphics.



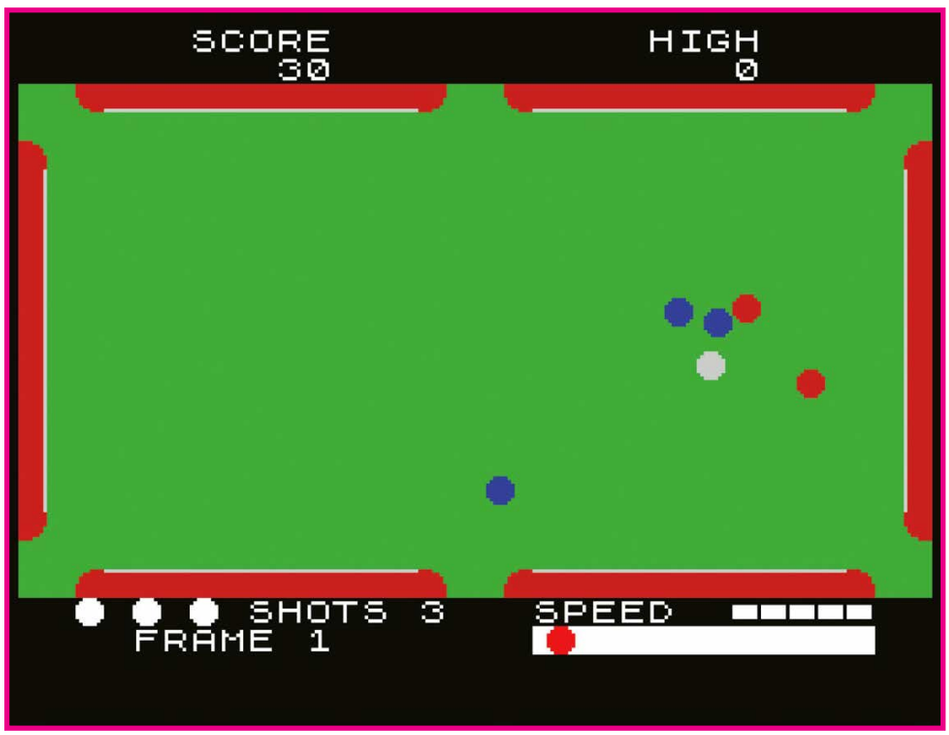
▶ **MC:** At our peak we had Andy Stagg on a Youth Training Scheme, Robin Grenville-Evans, who handled the graphics, with myself and Christian Penfold as additional coders and designers. After the big hit that was *Pimania*, we had the award-winning *Deus Ex Machina* – the world's first multimedia product folks! – which was also very successful. We all chipped in with all the jobs, even vacuuming. And we all got paid the same. Almost nothing!

GH: We didn't initially focus on developing our own games per se, as they were still arriving through the post. The team grew to around eight though, when the Fun Learning era started in 1984, and we found a strong niche by providing software directly to computer manufacturers.

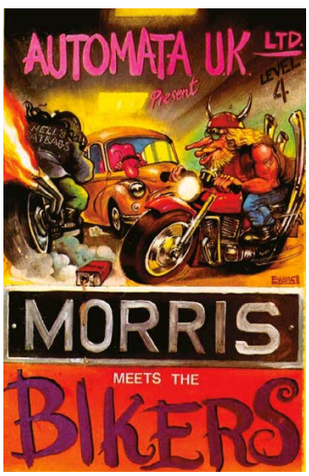
How did the industry change when distributors such as Leisuresoft, Gem Distribution, Specialist Distribution and CentreSoft entered the scene?

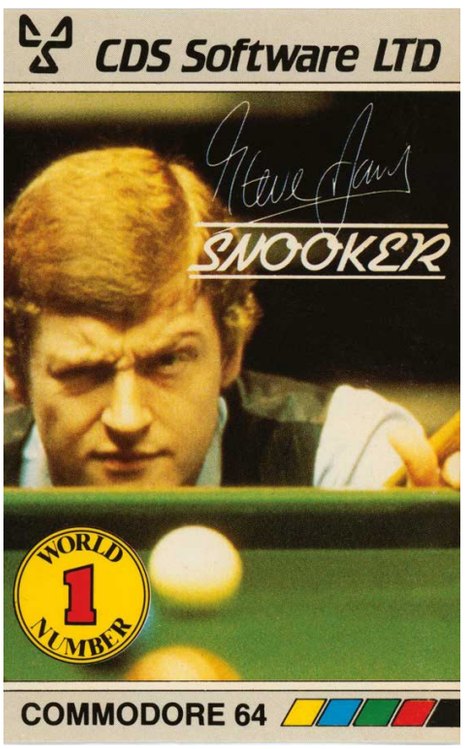
GH: These large distributors helped by centralising the buying process for retailers, but they soon began competing to win business and started offering exclusive deals with larger stores. This had an immediate impact, which could be beneficial due to volume, but often came with increased discounts and 'sale or return' clauses for unsold titles.

When *Steve Davis Snooker* reached number one in the charts, Specialist Distribution told us that Woolworths wanted it exclusively and

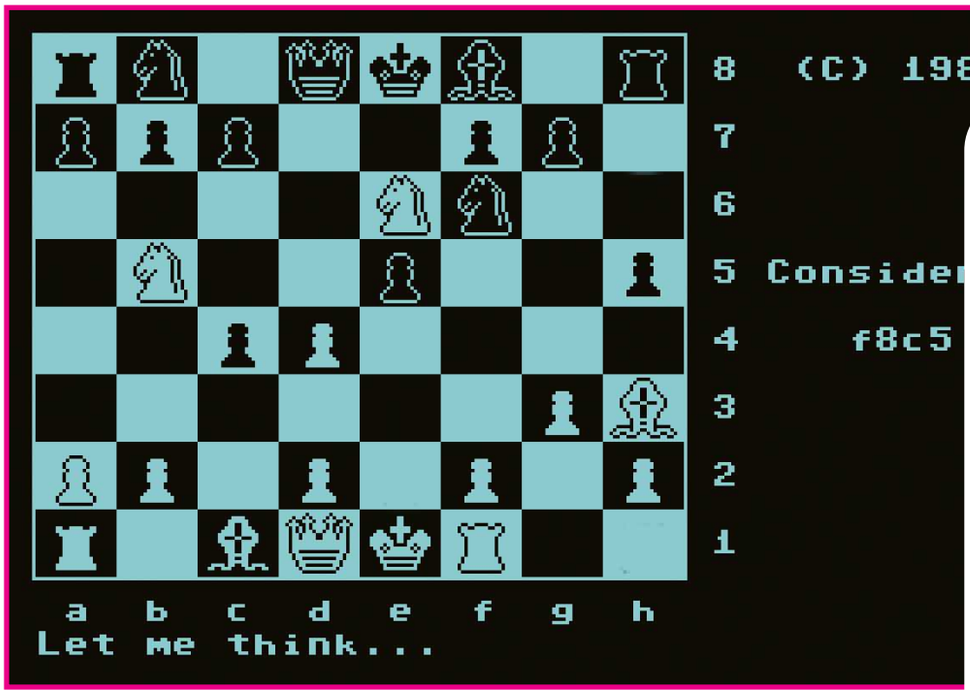


» [ZX Spectrum] *Pool* author Mike Lamb would go on to write huge hits for Ocean Software.





» This would become CDS' biggest hit, featuring a snooker world champion.



» [C64] *Colossus Chess* proved to be one of CDS' biggest success stories.

requested 10,000 copies, but at a 60% margin instead of the usual 50%. "Take it or leave it." We took it – and they had to come back for more!

TB: As Giles says, it was beneficial in many ways. We began a deal with CBS Records in 1984, which gave them sole distribution rights. They handled warehousing, order processing, delivery, debt collection and all the associated headaches – for a reasonable fee.

MC: It was the beginning of the rot, as far as I was concerned! And marked the start of the end when the parasites moved in. And by 'parasites' I mean wholesalers, distributors, retailers, agents, advertisers – the lot. Anyone that wanted to take a cut.

We once had a meeting with representatives from a distributor who came to see us in our offices. Christian chaired the meeting, and I sat there, quietly horrified… they asked us what our negotiating position was, and Christian said, "It's very simple – fuck off!" We very much preferred to do everything ourselves.

The computer-game market hit difficult times during 1984-1985 in the UK. How did this affect your company?

TB: Like many others, we were left in the lurch by a sudden halt in purchase orders. We had a lot of stock in our warehouses too, and much of it was sold off cheaply to discount wholesalers. Imagine Software had a very public implosion. Unfortunately, we shared the same bank as Imagine, and I think that experience left them somewhat less supportive than they might otherwise have been. We decided to enter voluntary liquidation. I believe the industry went from around 75 publishers to fewer than a dozen within a few weeks. And so ended the golden early era of gaming!

> "WE NEVER PAID FOR ADVERTISING… INSTEAD, WE CREATED COMIC STRIPS AND OTHER 'CONTENT' WHICH WE GAVE AWAY FOR FREE"
> **MEL CROUCHER**

MC: We were largely immune from the problems of the mass market, having decided to not take part in it. But by 1985, I was growing tired of the industry. We had gone into publishing for a laugh, and we had a lot of fun, but I decided to step away and try something else. Halcyon days! I sold my stake in Automata for 10p to Christian.

GH: We were careful not to put too many eggs in one basket with distributors, and often supplied games directly to computer manufacturers through other deals.

If you look at the companies that came through 1985 intact –such as Ocean, Elite and Ultimate – they were run by experienced business people who expanded cautiously. Many of the companies that struggled during this early period had the highest overheads and the most expensive advertising campaigns. Others were well run but simply very unlucky. We survived, and were still publishing games up until 2008. ✱

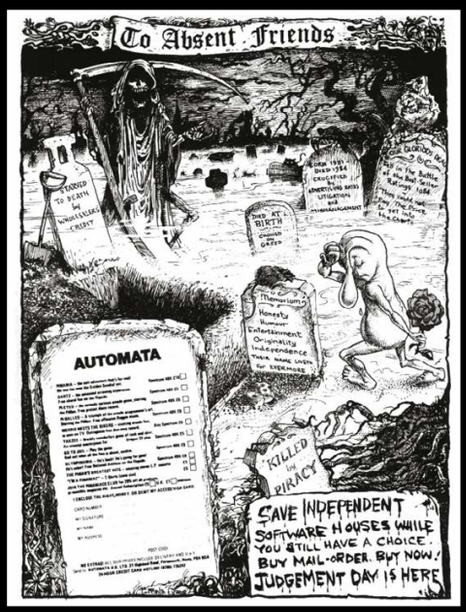
TROUBLE IN PARADISE

OVER MERE MONTHS, THE UK GAMES INDUSTRY WAS DECIMATED

Many factors came together to cause the huge implosion of computer games publishers in 1984 and 1985, with stalwarts such as Imagine, CRL, Quicksilva, Durell Software and Bug-Byte all hit badly, with many closing their doors permanently. Imagine was a victim of its own ambitions… but for others, it was a mixture of several critical events all coming together at once.

Business usually works within a three-month lead off. Retailers predict how many copies of titles from a publisher in, say, the beginning of September for the Christmas market. The publisher, given this advice, will then pay to order several thousand cassettes/disks. The publisher also had to book advertising in computer gaming magazines to appear in December.

But something bad happened. The retailers massively over-estimated the sales they would garner in the lead up to Christmas 1984, and with their shelves still over stocked, the big December orders didn't materialise. Many publishers, with warehouses full of not-so-old stock, didn't have the capital to stay afloat long enough for new orders to arrive. They were forced to off-load their games cheaply to wholesalers, who then flooded the market with heavily discounted games, exacerbating the situation.


To Absent Friends
AUTOMATA
KILLED BY PIRACY
SAVE INDEPENDENT SOFTWARE HOUSES WHILE YOU STILL HAVE A CHOICE. BUY MAIL-ORDER. BUT NOW, JUDGEMENT DAY IS HERE

» A doom-laden Automata advert that appeared in *Practical Computing Weekly* in 1984.

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

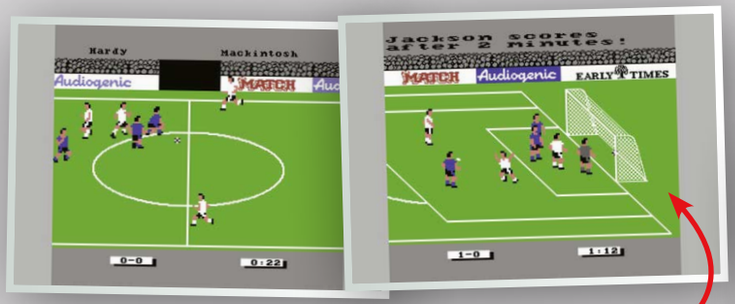
UNDERDOG FOOTBALL GAMES

IS IT POSSIBLE TO ROUND-UP THE BEST FOOTBALL GAMES WITHOUT INCLUDING THE BIG FOUR – KICK OFF, SENSIBLE SOCCER, PRO EVO AND FIFA? THAT'S OUR AIM HERE, AS WE CELEBRATE THIS SUMMER'S FOOTBALL WORLD CUP BY FOCUSSING ON THE OVERLOOKED AND UNFANCIED GAMES CAPABLE OF STEALING A WIN

Words by Martyn Carroll

TEHKAN WORLD CUP

Not the first game to adopt an overhead view of the action, but the one that popularised it. This 1985 arcade hit dispenses with the formalities – it's red team versus blue, get on with it and chase the ball. Tehkan would later become Tecmo and release the fantastic follow-up, *Tecmo World Cup '90*, four years later.

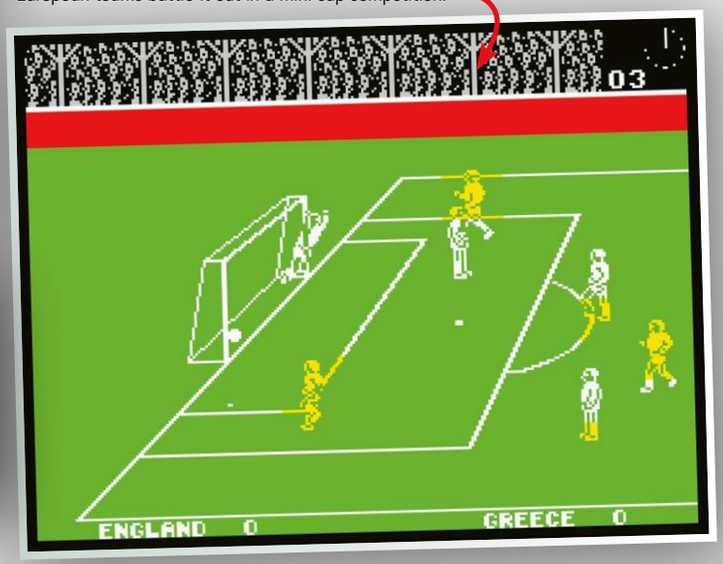


EMLYN HUGHES INTERNATIONAL SOCCER

Shaking off the suspect celebrity endorsement (Hughes was four years retired when this came out in 1988), Audiogenic's game leans heavily on that old C64 stalwart *International Soccer*. This means the action is fast and fluid, with a real arcade feel, and it comes with its own bag of tricks – slide tackles, back heels and diving headers.

INTERNATIONAL MATCH DAY

Jon Ritman scored on the Spectrum with the original *Match Day* and built on its success with this 1986 remix designed for the bigger-memory Spectrum 128. Aside from some extra animations and improved audio, it added a new Special mode where eight European teams battle it out in a mini cup competition.



NINTENDO WORLD CUP

Players sporting sunglasses? Opponents getting tackled so badly they stay down, comatose? Welcome to football, Technos Japan style. This Westernised version of a *Kunio-kun* entry is not aiming for realism, presenting a six-a-side riot where the rule book has been left in the dressing room. It's brilliant fun, basically.

STRIKER

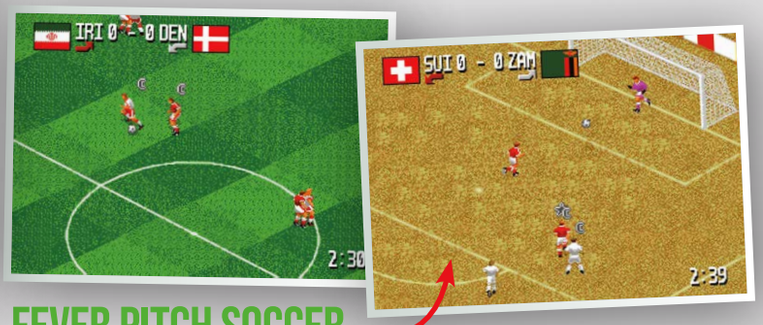
Developed by Rage Software and released initially for 16-bit computers in 1992, *Striker* delivers the ridiculously fast gameplay of *Kick Off* and *Sensible Soccer*, but adopts a 3D view that really does add an extra dimension to the play. The game was largely ignored due to the aforementioned hits, but it's definitely worth a run out.

VIRTUA STRIKER

This, the first football game to feature 3D polygon graphics, arrived in 1994, running on Sega's Model 2 hardware. Designed to give arcade players a few minutes of chaotic action, it's very shallow and completely unrealistic, but it's undeniably entertaining as you play the beautiful game beneath Sega's trademark blue skies.

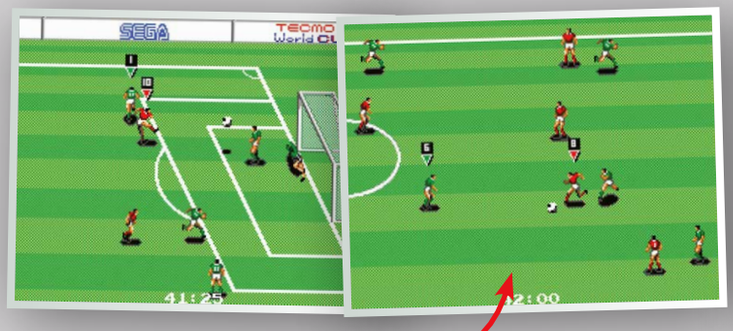
SUPER SIDEKICKS

SNK's long-running series debuted on the Neo Geo in 1992 and for us, the original absolutely nails what it set out to do – create a footie game that's fun to play, above all else. The playing mechanics are simplified to such a degree that anyone can get stuck straight in. And the wildly over-the-top goal celebrations seal the deal.



FEVER PITCH SOCCER

Borrowing *FIFA Soccer*'s isometric view, but stripping away most of the simulation elements, this 1995 Mega Drive release from US Gold is another that opts for all-out attack with strong arcade leanings. However, it's mainly remembered as the game that dabbled in football's dark arts, encouraging players to dive to win dodgy penalties.



TECMO WORLD CUP '93

Ignore the title as this Master System game has little to do with Tecmo. It's actually the European version of the Japanese release *Kick & Rush*. That said – the title works, as it evokes memories of Tecmo's series, where arcade gameplay leads the way and it's enlivened by a full-on, chiptune soundtrack. Easily the system's best football game.

LIBEROGRANDE

This 1997 arcade and PlayStation game from Namco is unique in that it's designed around the concept of controlling a single player throughout a match, rather than switching between team members. The action is viewed in the third-person, with the camera positioned right behind your player, creating an unrivalled sense of realism.

A TRIBUTE TO LUCASFILM GAMES

AFTER IMPRESSING WITH DEBUT TITLES BALLBLAZER AND RESCUE ON FRACTALUS, LUCASFILM GAMES HELPED DEFINE POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURES WITH MANIAC MANSION AND THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND. FORMER MANAGER STEVE ARNOLD REVIEWS THE ACCLAIMED STUDIO'S STELLAR OUTPUT

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

Formed in 1982, Lucasfilm Games was part of a division that included the group that would become Pixar. The studio initially focussed on original projects as the rights to *Star Wars* computer games had been licensed to Atari. Its early releases included the futuristic sports title *Ballblazer*, the flight combat titles *Rescue On Fractalus!* and *Koronis Rift*, and the cave exploration adventure *The Eidolon*, all of which came out in 1985.

The group's movie adaptation *Labyrinth* laid the groundwork for future graphic adventures in 1986, while its ground-breaking MMORPG *Habitat* went online in early 1987.

The same year saw Lucasfilm Games releasing the arcade ship sim *PHM Pegasus* and the point-and-click graphic adventure *Maniac Mansion*, and these popular titles defined the company going forward.

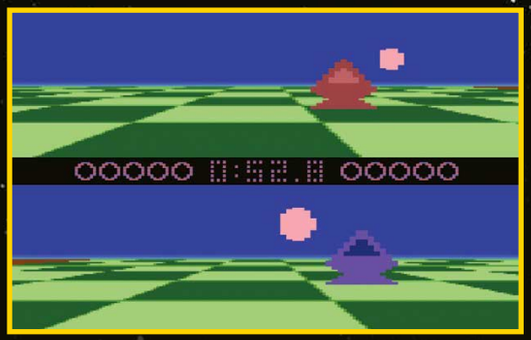
On the combat sim front and between the years 1988 and 1991, the studio created *Strike Fleet*, *Battlehawks 1942*, *Their Finest Hour* and *Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe*. As for graphic adventures, it found success during the same period with *Zak McKracken*, *Last Crusade*, *Loom*, *Monkey Island* and *Monkey Island 2*.

It also found time to publish *Last Crusade: The Action Game* and the puzzler *Pipe Dream* in 1989, the platformer *Night Shift* in 1990 and the isometric *Indiana Jones* action title *Fate Of Atlantis* in 1992.

Around this time, a reorganisation resulted in Lucasfilm Games becoming LucasArts Entertainment. However, the new studio still honours its predecessor's legacy, with recent examples being the 2020 flight combat title *Star Wars: Squadrons* and 2022's *Return To Monkey Island*.

STEVE ARNOLD

After working on research projects for Atari in the late-Seventies, Steve took over the running of Lucasfilm Games in the early Eighties. Bill Gates then hired him in the early Nineties, and he was subsequently made a vice president. In 1995, he cofounded the venture capital firm Polaris Partners, where he's now partner emeritus.



BALLBLAZER

ATARI 800, VARIOUS • 1985

■ Best described as one-on-one soccer played in motorised vehicles, *Ballblazer* depicts a futuristic sport where scoring the most goals wins you matches. As with football, there are goals and balls to fire into them. However, in *Ballblazer* the ball is held in place in front of your vehicle when you have possession, and the goal posts move from side to side and get smaller as matches proceed. Adding to *Ballblazer*'s futuristic credentials is the option of playing robot opponents, but as you might expect it's more fun played in two-player mode. It's worth noting that *Ballblazer* plays out in a first-person perspective, which at the time of its release was impressive for a computer game.

KORONIS RIFT

ATARI 800, VARIOUS • 1985

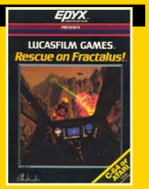
■ As with other early Lucasfilm Games, you explore a first-person perspective world in *Koronis Rift*. Your objective is to find alien vessels and scavenge parts from them. These are guarded by UFOs, which adds intense shoot-'em-up action to the game's seek-and-recover-based gameplay.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

We didn't make *Koronis Rift* a *Star Wars* game just because we didn't have the *Star Wars* licence rights. They had already been sold to other people by the licensing division. I remember when we were brainstorming we came up with this idea of alien archaeology, which tied in a little bit to *Indiana Jones*. So we put the idea and concept into *Koronis Rift* of 'What if you were exploring another planet?'"

RESCUE ON FRACTALUS!

ATARI 800, VARIOUS • 1985



■ Considered something of a technical marvel on its release, *Rescue On Fractalus!* has you piloting a craft over a mountainous alien planet. The challenges of doing so are reflected by your mission to rescue downed pilots, although thanks to a suggestion by George Lucas, some of the beacons your craft's sensors pick up belong to murderous aliens in pilot uniforms. Your only hope if you're attacked by one is to blast into the sky before they break into your cockpit. Once airborne, you still have flying saucers and fixed gun installations to contend with, but once you've rescued your quota of pilots you can briefly recuperate in your mothership before returning to Fractalus for another sortie.

PILOT'S BRIEFING WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE BRAVING FRACTALUS

NAVIGATION NIGHTMARE

■ Flying over the barren world of Fractalus is tricky; not only is it one big mountain range but its skies are thick with acid mist.

ARMED FORCES

■ Flying saucers patrolling Fractalus rapidly deplete your shields, and fixed artillery on its mountains can hit you from miles away.

RESCUE MISSION

■ Finding pilots on Fractalus is like looking for a needle in a haystack; luckily your navigation system can pinpoint their positions.

SURPRISE ATTACKS

■ Not every pilot that your craft's instruments locate is actually a pilot. Sometimes they turn out to be aliens that try to kill you!

THE EIDOLON

ATARI 800, VARIOUS • 1985

■ Despite its complex plot, this first-person shooter is relatively straightforward. Each of its cave systems has battles where both sides fire orb projectiles. Red ones cause the most damage, blue and green ones freeze and alter foes respectively, and yellow ones provide health when collected.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

Brainstorming probably did contribute to the design of *The Eidolon* at some level, but Charlie Kellner, who was the lead guy on the product ultimately owned the design, even though there were a bunch of other people contributing to it. It wasn't unusual for there to be a fairly large shift from whatever the original concept was to the final product. It's true that the original vision for *The Eidolon* was a lot larger and harder to do than Charlie thought. He was also on a deadline, so at some point he had to simplify it a little bit."

LABYRINTH

C64, VARIOUS • 1986

■ Although it uses word wheels, *Labyrinth* laid the groundwork for Lucasfilm Games' subsequent point-and-click titles. The goal is to navigate a maze while interacting with characters, solving puzzles and avoiding dangers. It's set in the movie's fantasy world but the game has its own distinct plot.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

George Lucas asked if we wanted to make a game based on *Labyrinth*, so of course we said sure! We had been wanting to do a movie-based game for a while but had been unable to. We spent a week with Douglas Adams in London. He contributed a lot of the dialogue. He was comedic of course; hysterically funny and irreverent. He came up with a *lot* of things that we couldn't use. It's probably the case that we got Douglas through a connection with Jim Henson."

MANIAC MANSION

C64, VARIOUS • 1987

■ Taking equal inspiration from B-movies and horror flicks, *Maniac Mansion* tasks you with guiding a group of teens around a movie grade sociopath's creepy dwelling. Rather than typing in commands, the quirky humoured adventure gives you a point-and-click interface to control the player characters.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

I think we did something with *Maniac Mansion* that was significant in terms of storytelling. It was ground-breaking on a lot of levels. It set the tone for that sort of comedy/puzzle format that became a style that then evolved under Ron Gilbert's design leadership. Other folks joined in with that kind of stuff as well, but it was a style that I think really evolved from the success of *Maniac Mansion*, and also from the sensibilities of the people that we had on its team."

CHARACTER STUDY

JUST A FEW OF MANIAC MANSION'S ECLECTIC HEROES

DAVE

■ Everyman Dave makes the plot work. His girlfriend has been kidnapped by a mad scientist, and in order to save her he has to lead his friends into the mysterious Mansion.

BERNARD

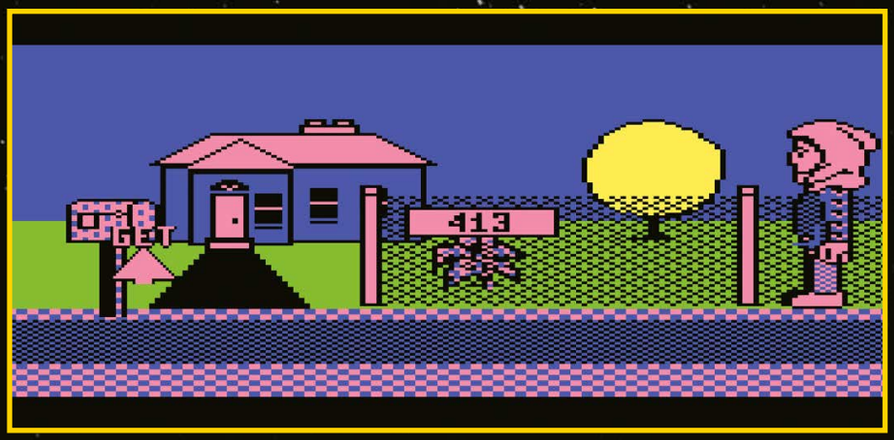
■ Bespectacled Bernard doesn't look like he would be useful in a fight, but he's a wiz at repairing electrical appliances. Who knows when that might come in handy?

SYD

■ Aspiring New Wave musician Syd is pure Eighties. The wannabe Elvis Costello's dubious special skills include playing the piano and putting hamsters in microwaves.

RAZOR

■ Leader of the teenage punk band Razor And The SCUMMettes. Razor was inspired by artist Gary Winnick's girlfriend, but her look was based on the singer Tori Amos.



HABITAT

C64, VARIOUS • 1987

■ Part MMORPG, part life sim, *Habitat* is like a graphic adventure where you set your own goals instead of solving puzzles. You design an avatar, buy and sell things, and explore and interact with a virtual world, but the main draw is social networking.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

Habitat came about because I had a conversation with a guy who was in charge of business development at AOL. We had been talking about online games, and Chip Morningstar had the sense that we could do that and had some design ideas. So we negotiated a deal where we built the frontend and AOL built the backend. We were doing this on a 300 Baud connection on an 8-bit microprocessor, so there were some limitations, but it was manageable for a first-generation online multiplayer game. The beta test was a runaway hit, people stayed on all the time. The problem was that the server software was not efficient enough for AOL to run it as a commercial product because it would lose money. So we were never able to bring it out as it was originally envisioned."

GAME-CHANGER

WHY THE C64 SIM WAS SO GROUND-BREAKING

ONLINE MULTIPLAYER

■ By connecting to the online service Quantum Link, C64 owners could interact with other *Habitat* players around the United States.

SOCIAL NETWORK

■ Long before Facebook or X, you could chat to people online while playing *Habitat* just by typing your thoughts into word bubbles.

OPEN WORLD

■ Although it didn't offer infinite exploration, *Habitat* had approximately 20,000 screens to visit in whatever order you wanted to.

YOU GOT MAIL

■ Contacting offline *Habitat* players involved writing a virtual letter that once posted, would be sent to its recipient's inventory.

PHM PEGASUS

C64, VARIOUS • 1987

■ The first of a long line of military sims developed by Lucasfilm Games, *PHM Pegasus* puts you in command of hydrofoil missile craft, patrol ships and helicopters. Missions are based around locating and then taking out groups of enemy ships across the world's oceans.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

We wanted to move into the direction of simulation with *PHM Pegasus* because that was a category that was emerging at the time. The goal there was to try to get a little bit of that simulation authenticity without totally giving up on the action. Then by the time we got to making World War II flight simulators they were historical simulations. There was a sense of wanting to be as authentic as we could while also making them fun and interesting, and that was the difference between our simulations and all of the other ones. Those simulations were accurate but they weren't fun. They weren't designed to be fun; they were designed to be simulations. We took that category to be an area where we could try to look at the intersection of story, action and simulation."

STRIKE FLEET

C64, VARIOUS • 1988

■ Very much a spiritual successor to *PHM Pegasus*, *Strike Fleet* has the same look, feel and mechanics as its ship-combat sim predecessor. That said, it differentiates itself in a number of ways. First and foremost, in *Strike Fleet* you're in charge of a whole fleet of ships, each of which you can take direct control over. Unlike in *PHM Pegasus*, you get to assemble your fleet pre-mission. *Strike Fleet*'s missions are also distinct from the earlier sim's, which are generic battle scenarios. By comparison, *Strike Fleet* puts you into historically accurate combat situations, and there are twelve campaigns to fight in, where *PHM Pegasus* only has four. Being a sim, travelling across oceans happens in real time, but you can speed that up by up to 128 times to get straight into battle. ▶

ZAK MCKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS

PC, VARIOUS • 1988

■ The point-and-click adventure Lucasfilm Games made after *Maniac Mansion*, *Zak McKracken* is an evolution of the earlier game and proved just as successful. As well as tabloid reporter Zak, you control a scientist and two students on a mission to save Earth from plotting aliens.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

The wacky humour in *Zak McKracken* came from a conversation David Fox and I had. What originated that whole story about the alien mindbenders was the tabloid newspapers that we had in the US at the time. They were a joke. The *National Enquirer* would have stories like the president shaking hands with an alien; it was really stupid. So we thought we would pick up on that, and do something with a theme that was essentially adapted from those tabloids. That was where we got the alien mindbenders and all of that stuff."

PECULIAR PUZZLES SOME OF ZAK MCKRACKEN'S CRAZIER CONUNDRUMS

MAP MADNESS

■ Zak dreams about a potentially useful map, so get the crayons under his sink, rip off some wallpaper and draw the map on that.

CUNNING DISGUISE

■ Aliens running the phone company use hats and fake moustaches as disguises. If you wear those items they let you snoop around.

PLANE CRAZY

■ You need to distract the cabin crew to get a lighter under a seat. Flooding the loo and microwaving an egg should do the trick!

LIGHTEN UP!

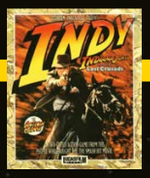
■ To illuminate the dark cave get a bird's nest and a tree branch, put them in the fire pit and set them alight with the lighter.

BATTLEHAWKS 1942

PC, VARIOUS • 1988

■ The third of Lucasfilm Games' military combat sims is a departure in that it features planes instead of ships and helicopters, although it's still mission based with locating and shooting up opponents providing the core gameplay. *Battlehawks 1942* is an interesting title in several respects. It puts you in the cockpits of World War II fighter planes dogfighting over land and above oceans, but it nevertheless feels like a prototype for the *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* games that LucasArts published years later. This makes a lot of sense when you consider that developer Totally Games went on to create those *Star Wars* titles after making *Battlehawks 1942* and its two follow-ups. *Battlehawks 1942* is also interesting in its own right. It recreates major air battles of the Pacific war, and when you get tired of flying the American planes while fighting on the US side you can instead opt to pilot one of the Japanese planes in service of the country's emperor.

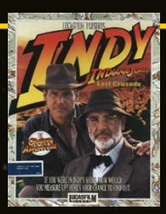
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: THE ACTION GAME



PC, VARIOUS • 1989

■ Not many movies are big enough to justify an arcade *and* adventure game adaptation, but *Last Crusade* was the most popular film of 1989 so it follows that it could support both. The action variant is the less well-remembered release, but it's worth noting that it sold in its millions and unseated *RoboCop* as the best-selling title in the UK. Like the game it usurped, Lucasfilm's *Last Crusade* action game has four-way scrolling, enemies to dispatch and platforming. The platforming involved in the game is challenging. There's no need for pixel perfection as you guide Indy through levels ranging from cave systems and train tops to castles and zeppelins, but you get punished if you get your timing wrong. Of course, players expected that, which explains why the game was so popular.

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: THE GRAPHIC ADVENTURE



PC, VARIOUS • 1989

■ The adventure take on *Last Crusade* uses the point-and-click system that *Maniac Mansion* pioneered. It quite wisely expands on some aspects of the movie and misses other bits out in order to make the most of scenes that are suited for adaptation into puzzles.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

It may have been that David Fox or Noah Falstein started out leading this project and then Ron Gilbert stepped in at some point. I actually don't remember. It was probably done on a schedule because the goal was to bring the game out alongside the movie, and it may have been to do with resources, where we got them to do different components. But somebody would have needed to *own* the vision considering the model that we had. So I'm guessing it was a hand-off, because I doubt we had all three of them working on it at the same time."

EPIC ENVIRONMENTS

MEMORABLE LOCATIONS FROM THE INDY ADVENTURE

BARNETT COLLEGE

■ The austere wood-panelled college where Indy works as a professor sets up the game's plot while posing a few challenges for players to overcome.

VENICE

■ There's no time for sightseeing in Venice. In fact Indy spends most of his time in dusty catacombs he finds after solving a puzzle in a library.

THE CATACOMBS

■ If you can find your way through the catacombs' dimly lit mazes and overcome their fiendish puzzles your reward is information on the Holy Grail.

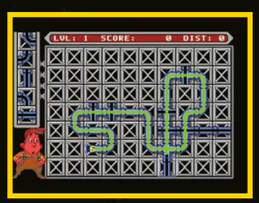
CASTLE BRUNWALD

■ There are more mazes and puzzles in this Nazi-occupied castle, but much of the fun in the level comes from fooling guards into helping Indy out.

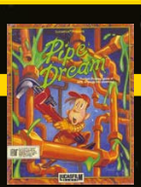
THEIR FINEST HOUR: THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

PC, VARIOUS • 1989

■ As well as its focus on *The Battle Of Britain*, *Their Finest Hour* also distinguishes itself from its predecessor *Battlehawks 1942* in various other areas of its design. There's a mission builder mode where you design custom battles. There's a replay option where you can review missions you've undertaken. Additional strategy is brought into play with a campaign mode where the historical outcome of The Battle Of Britain might change depending on your actions. Here you assign squadrons of planes to different missions within the overall campaign before flying in a battle of your choice. The outcome of one mission can affect the outcome of others, and by extension the campaign as a whole. The game's main mode has just as much to offer. There are training missions for each plane, and historically accurate defence or attack missions depending on which side you fight for. You can also alternate between controlling the pilot and the gunner, or the pilot and bombardier if you're flying a bomber rather than a fighter plane.

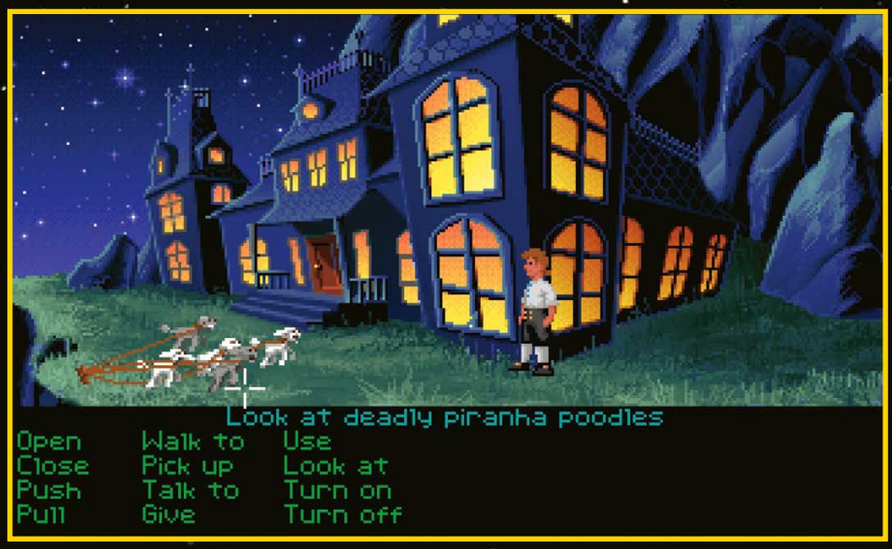


PIPE DREAM

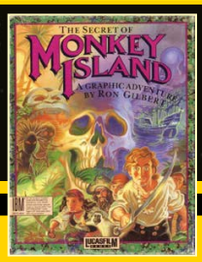


PC, VARIOUS • 1989

■ Aside from renaming the Amiga original when it came to making its ports, Lucasfilm Games made *Pipe Dream* look and play just like The Assembly Line's *Pipe Mania*. *Pipe Dream* plays similarly to *Tetris* while presenting a unique challenge. Where *Tetris* has you stacking falling blocks with a view to removing rows, *Pipe Dream* has you joining different pipe sections together within a restricted space with the aim of forming a long enough pipe to satisfy the conditions of the level. Like *Tetris*, *Pipe Dream* is played against the clock. The way this works is that liquid is pumped through the pipe soon after you start extending it, and if it reaches the end before you've added enough sections then you have to replay the level. Beyond this basic premise, fresh complications are introduced from stage to stage. Longer pipes have to be built, the speed that the liquid fills the pipe increases and obstacles stop you extending the pipe to parts of the screen.



THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND



PC, VARIOUS • 1990

■ By the time Lucasfilm Games created the point-and-click *Monkey Island* it had perfected its unique blend of worldbuilding, wacky humour and compelling puzzles. Told from the perspective of aspiring pirate Guybrush Threepwood, Ron Gilbert's adventure is a master class in storytelling and gameplay.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

The story behind the name LeChuck is funny. It was actually an inside joke. I used to make reference to these imaginary characters Chuck and Lurleen. I would say to the guys that I wanted them to make a character named Chuck. So there's a plant in *Maniac Mansion* called Chuck, and that's why. Then because I was continually ribbing Ron about this when he made *Monkey Island* he named a character 'LeChuck'. Somebody might have made a character named Lurleen at some point, I can't remember. But I remember that it was an inside joke. It didn't make any sense to anybody else, but it did to us."

ONLY JOKING FUNNY FEATURES FROM THE HIT POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE

INSULT TRADING

■ Like old pirate movies, *Monkey Island*'s cast are adept at insults, so much so that they prefer trading insults to sword fighting.

PIRANHA POODLES

■ A Governor's Mansion having guard dogs to fend off pirates follows, but only *Monkey Island*'s Governor would have piranha poodles.

CHICKEN PULLEY

■ You can't use a rubber chicken to slide down a zip wire, but what about one with a pulley? In *Monkey Island* this works perfectly.

FUSSY CANNIBALS

■ When you meet *Monkey Island*'s cannibals you think all is lost, but luckily they've decided to move away from eating people. Phew!

LOOM

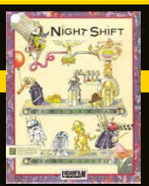
PC, VARIOUS • 1990

■ It's a shame that *Loom* wasn't more successful given how ambitious the fantasy adventure was. Unlike every other Lucasfilm Games point-and-click adventure it has a serious storyline, and its puzzles are solved by playing a magic flute rather than using objects and interacting with characters.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

Loom used SCUMM; it just didn't use the interface in the same way. It was fabulous. For people who really liked games they liked that game, exactly because of the innovative interface and player controls. Even the colour palette and graphics were done differently, and it certainly showed in the game. Ben Moriarty who was the project leader was really talented. He was one of the people who had done games at Infocom, so he had worked on some of the early story games. So I was very surprised and super disappointed by the fact that it wasn't hugely successful. But it had a lot of competition, and it was probably not well marketed."

NIGHT SHIFT



PC, VARIOUS • 1990

■ How do you theme a game set in a toy factory around Lucasfilm properties? You make the toys that are being made into Lucasfilm action figures, and that's *Night Shift*'s premise in a nutshell. Naturally you don't get to just stand there on quality control. Instead, you're in charge of repairing The Beast, a massive all-purpose machine that produces plastic parts, paints them and assembles them into the finished products. To say The Beast is high maintenance is an understatement. Its components constantly need adjusting, repaired, recharged and relit. Just when you think you've flicked every switch the correct way, pressed every button that needs pressing and turned every dial the correct amount you realise The Beast produces a certain percentage of flawed goods even when it's firing on all cylinders. Reject toys are docked from your wages, and wages allow you move to less dismal accommodation, so it's in your interests to produce more toys than required to take account of this. Last but not least, The Beast's components are reached by platforming between them, and you're on the clock so you have to be quick.

MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

PC, VARIOUS • 1991

■ It's hard to understand why a sequel would sell poorly when its predecessor did well and the follow-up improves on it in various ways. Nevertheless, that happened with *Monkey Island 2*. Of its many advances, the second *Monkey Island* most obviously stands out from the first by being far less linear. Instead it plays out in something that feels like an open world where you travel back and forth between three islands. Another clear difference is *Monkey Island 2*'s focus on dialogue-based puzzles, where selecting the correct responses to a series of questions lets you make progress through the game. There are also puzzles where objects are required to overcome obstacles, of course, and there are odd, funny and disgusting challenges like keeping someone in a coffin until they give you an item, using a monkey as a makeshift wrench and a spitting contest. More broadly, the puzzles in *Monkey Island 2* are harder than those in the first title, although there's a mode with fewer puzzles to solve.

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE

PC • 1991

■ The last of the WWII titles developed by Totally Games for Lucasfilm Games before it shifted over to making *Star Wars* combat flight sims, *Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe* takes a unique approach that's hinted at by its name. More specifically, it has you flying experimental Nazi aircraft powered by jet propulsion engines and armed with missiles into battle against slower but more numerous piston-engine-powered American planes. The modes available in *Secret Weapons* are equally interesting. Tour Of Duty allows you to create a pilot and take them into a set number of missions, during which they gain experience points, rise up the ranks and receive commendations. Mission Builder has an interesting feature that lets you set up waves of planes on both sides, and Campaign Battles gives you the opportunity to build a series of missions across an entire air war. Lastly, Historical Missions drops you into preset battles that you create a pilot or crew for. Despite all this depth, *Secret Weapons* remains an action sim at its core.

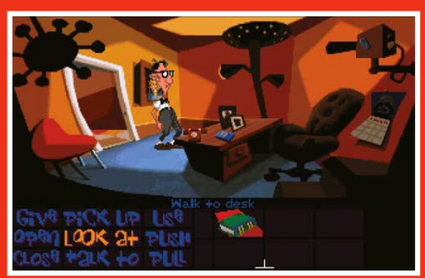
INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS: THE ACTION GAME

PC, VARIOUS • 1992

■ Published under Lucasfilm, but produced by Attention To Detail, this version of *Fate Of Atlantis* was a result of the same thinking as when Lucasfilm Games developed a point-and-click adventure based on the Indy movie *Last Crusade* and outsourced the action title. The two *Fate Of Atlantis* titles aren't based on a movie, of course, but they do share the same plot. The *Action Game* uses an isometric perspective and has similar controls to *Knight Lore*'s, where you rotate Indy left and right, and push forward when he's facing in the desired direction. You can also alternate between the man in the hat and ally Sophia Hapgood, who can spring Indy from Nazi detention if he gets beaten up. The hero is at constant risk of this happening while he tries to meet the overall objectives of the game's five levels, as Nazi agents lurk around every corner waiting to take him on in a fight. His greater goals include gambling for funds in a casino, bartering for vital information with the casino owner and infiltrating a Nazi naval base. Later challenges involve defusing a bomb on a submarine bound for an island where you search for the mythical Atlantis.

LUCASARTS ENTERTAINMENT

THE SUCCESSOR TO LUCASFILM GAMES



■ After Lucasfilm Games transitioned into LucasArts Entertainment, point-and-click adventures, flight combat sims and action games remained the order of the day. The majority of these were *Star Wars* titles, with the exception of point-and-click titles such as *Fate Of Atlantis*, *Day Of The Tentacle*, *Full Throttle* and *Grim Fandango*. During this time, the studio also released the *Super Star Wars* series of action games and the *X-Wing/TIE Fighter* series of combat flight simulators. To date, LucasArts' 21st century output has focussed predominantly on *Star Wars*, although it has also published some *Monkey Island* and *Indiana Jones* games, as well as original releases.

Turbo OutRun

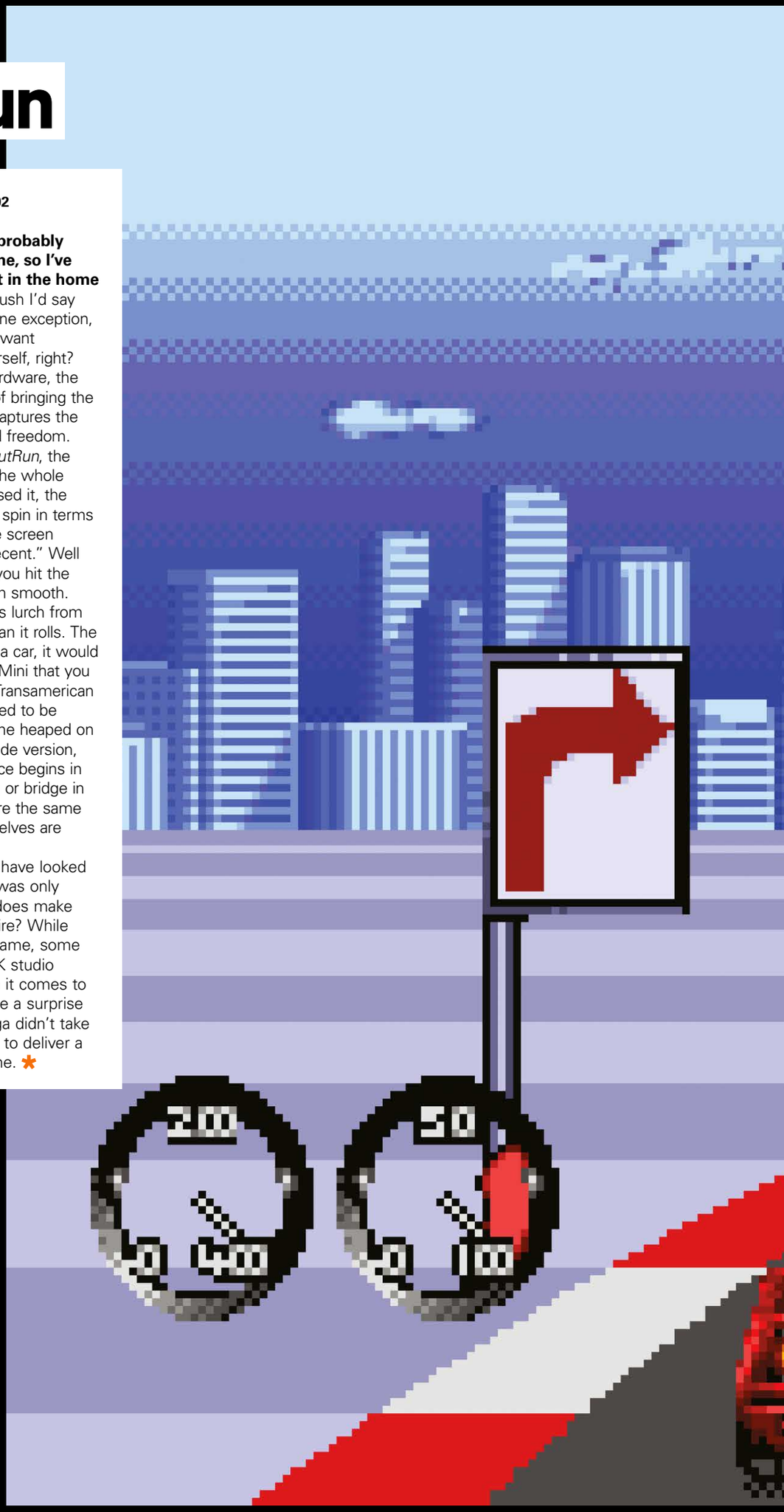
"TAKE A HIKE, PAL!"

» SEGA MEGA DRIVE » 1992
» UNKNOWN

The original *Out Run* is probably my favourite arcade game, so I've always taken an interest in the home versions. With a broad brush I'd say they're all hugely disappointing – with one exception, Sega's own Mega Drive version. If you want something done properly, you do it yourself, right? Despite lacking the coin-op's scaling hardware, the Mega Drive does a commendable job of bringing the game home. In particular, it genuinely captures the original's sense of speed and open road freedom.

For the 1989 arcade sequel, *Turbo OutRun*, the home versions are much improved on the whole – with one exception. Yes, you've guessed it, the Mega Drive version does a 180-degree spin in terms of quality. You're probably looking at the screen here and thinking, "That looks pretty decent." Well yes, it does. The problems start when you hit the accelerator and you see that it's far from smooth. The scrolling is choppy, the backgrounds lurch from side to side and the road rocks more than it rolls. The performance is poor, basically. If it was a car, it would have more in common with the Austin Mini that you inexplicably encounter throughout this Transamerican race than the Ferrari F40 you're supposed to be driving. You could understand if the game heaped on the trackside scenery to match the arcade version, but the stages are oddly sparse. The race begins in New York City yet there's not a building or bridge in sight. The locations you pass through are the same as in the coin-op, but the stages themselves are unrecognisable – and surprisingly short.

Someone at Sega Of America must have looked at the game and vetoed it, because it was only released in Japan and PAL regions. It does make you wonder who was behind this misfire? While the guilty party is not revealed in the game, some sources suggest it was Tiertex. The UK studio doesn't have the best reputation when it comes to its conversion work, so this wouldn't be a surprise if true. The biggest surprise is that Sega didn't take a more active role in the development, to deliver a conversion worthy of the *Out Run* name. ✱



STAGE 1

ULTIMATE GUIDE

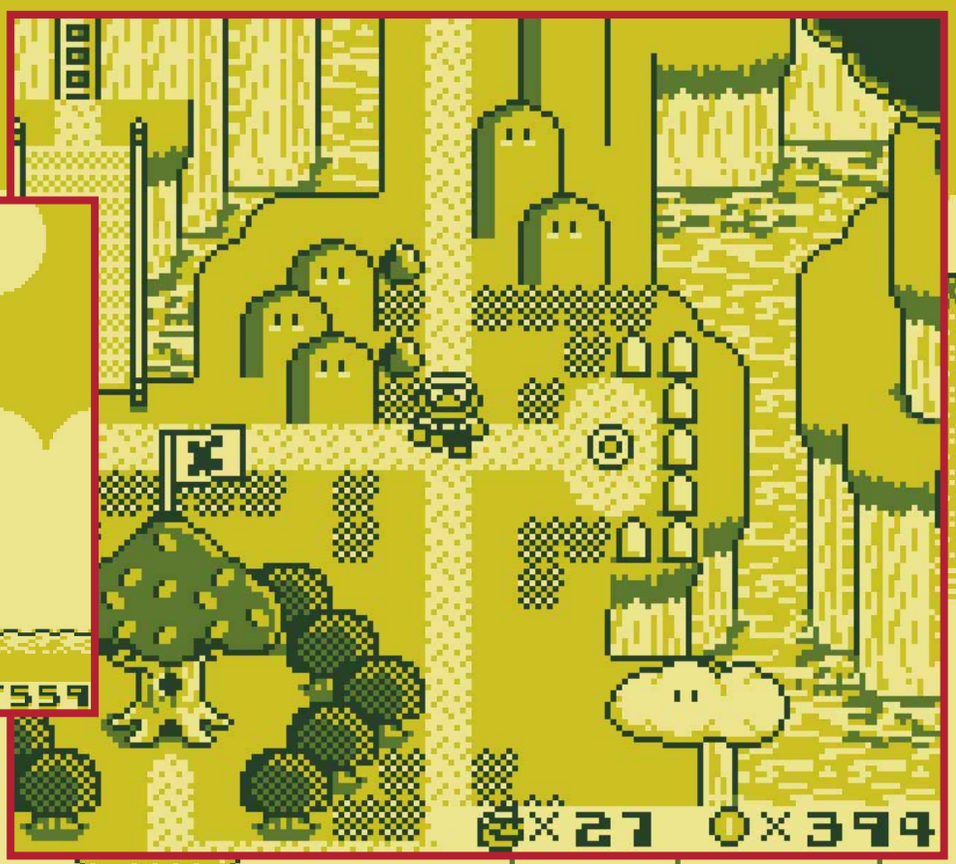
SUPER MARIO LAND 2
6 Golden Coins

IN THE KNOW

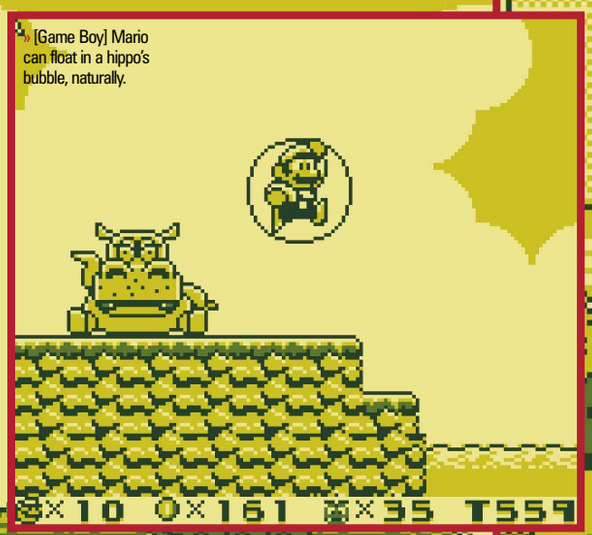
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO R&D1
- **PLATFORM:** GAME BOY
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

WHEN MARIO'S SECOND GAME BOY OUTING DEBUTED IN 1992, IT DID SO AS THE ODDEST MARIO GAME YET. BUT THE STRANGENESS OF SUPER MARIO LAND 2: SIX GOLDEN COINS WASN'T AN ACCIDENT. IT WAS NINTENDO R&D1 INTENTIONALLY DEFINING WHAT A HANDHELD MARIO GAME SHOULD BE

WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO



» [Game Boy] The new map allows Mario to fully explore his surroundings.



» [Game Boy] Mario can float in a hippo's bubble, naturally.

There's a moment that happens sometime between floating through the sky inside a hippopotamus' spit bubble and battling a witch in a zone reminiscent of *Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas*, when the realisation suddenly hits that *Super Mario Land 2: Six Golden Coins* is anything but a typical romp through Mario's Mushroom Kingdom.

To understand how such an unusual *Mario* game came to be, it's useful to know where it came from. Mario's first two handheld games were not developed by Mario's customary maker, Shigeru Miyamoto, who was by that time leading Nintendo R&D4 (later known as Nintendo EAD). Instead, development fell to the staff of the equally fascinating, if less well-known, Nintendo R&D1.

"SIX GOLDEN COINS IS ANYTHING BUT A TYPICAL ROMP THROUGH MARIO'S MUSHROOM KINGDOM"

Led by Gunpei Yokoi and helmed by legendary creatives like Yoshio Sakamoto and Toru Osawa, R&D1 had spent much of the Eighties helping to shape Nintendo's identity, creating the Game & Watch and Game Boy hardware, plus games like *Metroid*, *Kid Icarus* and *Famicom Detective Club*.

In the late-Eighties, when R&D1 was tasked with building a *Mario* game for Nintendo's handheld, it approached it from a different angle. *Super Mario Land*, released in 1989, featured many incongruous elements never seen in a *Mario* game. For example, it takes place in the surreal setting of Sarasaland, a land of sphinxes and out-of-place Moai heads. Everything is small and oddly proportioned, there are unusual shooter segments in which Mario pilots a submarine or propellor plane, Princess Peach is replaced by the new Princess Daisy, and the game's unlikely antagonist is an alien named Tatanga. Even the game's physics felt different.

Despite these departures from the *Mario* formula, *Super Mario Land* was a massive success, selling over 18 million copies on its way to becoming the fourth best-selling Game Boy game of all time.

For *Super Mario Land 2*, Nintendo R&D1 balanced the weirdness with a significant leap in scale and ambition. Sprites are larger and more expressive, closer in style to those from 1990's *Super Mario World*, while the game world itself, the titular Mario Land, became a navigable overworld with six unique zones that could be tackled in any order (a first for the series). New power-ups joined old favourites, and new mechanics were born as well, such as an in-game shop system and earnable bonus minigames. And then there's *Super Mario Land 2*'s new antagonist, a greedy, grinning rival who would go on to great infamy and fortune in future Nintendo titles: Wario. ▶

MODERN MARIO LAND

WHERE TO PLAY MARIO LAND 2 TODAY

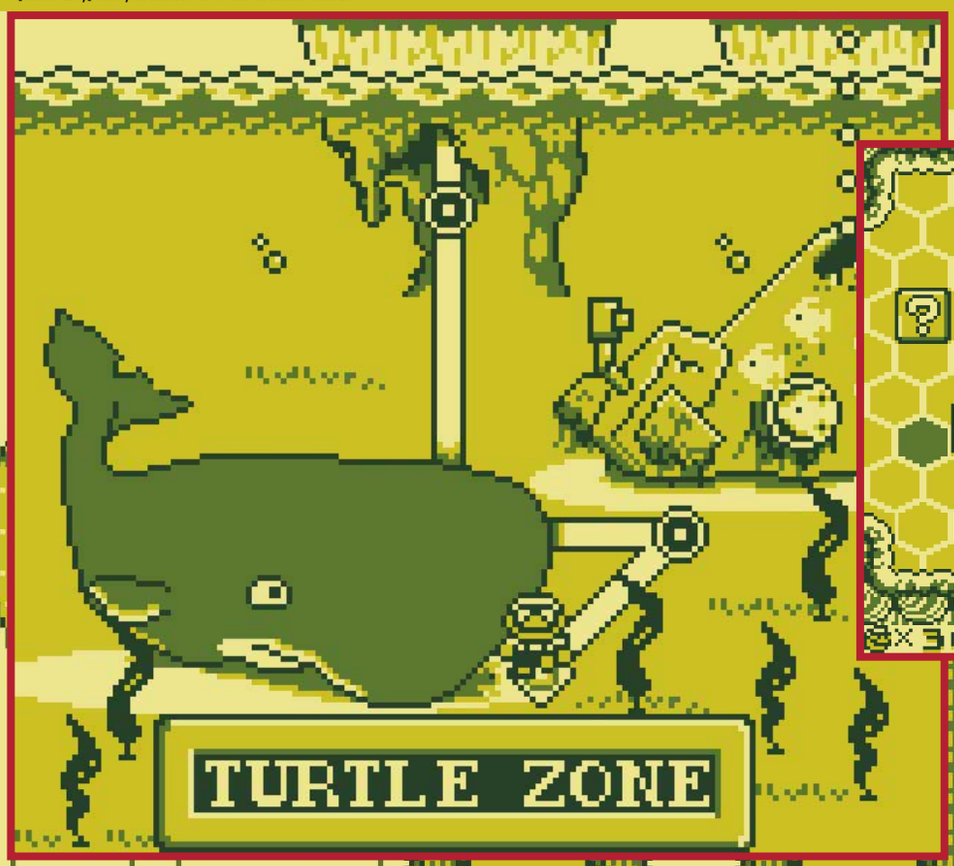
NINTENDO 3DS

■ *Super Mario Land 2* can be played on relatively few consoles. In 2011, it was rereleased on the 3DS' eShop, which has been shut down since 2023. If you bought the game then, you may still download it (for now). If not, you're sadly out of luck.

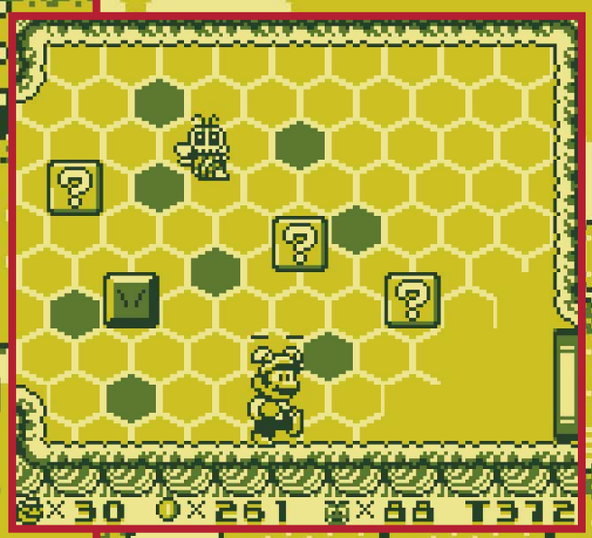
NINTENDO SWITCH AND SWITCH 2

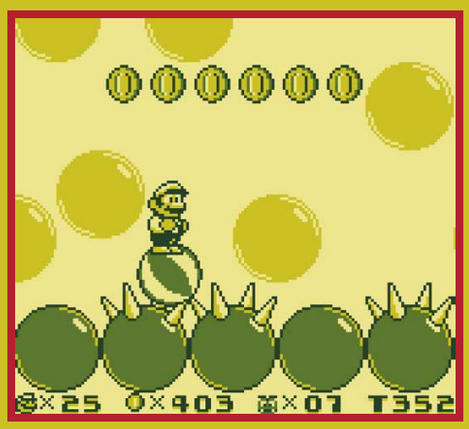
■ *Super Mario Land 2* is also playable via Nintendo Classics, an emulated retro games service that Nintendo offers to subscribers of its Nintendo Online Service for the Switch and Switch 2. With save states and crisp visuals, it's a very convenient way to play the game today.

» [Game Boy] Can you believe all of this is inside a turtle?



» [Game Boy] Mini Mario runs from a bee in Macro Zone.





» [Game Boy] Pumpkin Zone features the spookiest music and visuals.

▶ It plays beautifully, with tighter movement than its predecessor, landing somewhere between the precision of *Super Mario Bros 3* and the momentum-based movement of *Super Mario World*. The level design, while certainly experimental and varied, feels more curated than in the previous handheld *Mario*. And the run time, while still short by mainline *Mario* game standards, is more than doubled over *Super Mario Land*. By virtually every possible metric (aside from total sales), *Super Mario Land 2* is an improvement over the original Game Boy *Mario* game.

"THE ADVENTURE CULMINATES IN A LEGITIMATELY DIFFICULT ASSAULT TO RETAKE MARIO'S CASTLE"

***Super Mario Land 2* takes place immediately following the events of the first game.** After defeating Tatanga and rescuing Princess Daisy, Mario returns to his idyllic island, Mario Land, to find his castle usurped and the people enslaved by a greedy villain, Wario. The door to Wario's castle is locked and can only be unlocked if Mario collects six magical coins held by six bosses in six unique zones throughout the land. These zones can be played in any order, an interesting idea that presaged the non-linear progression of future titles.

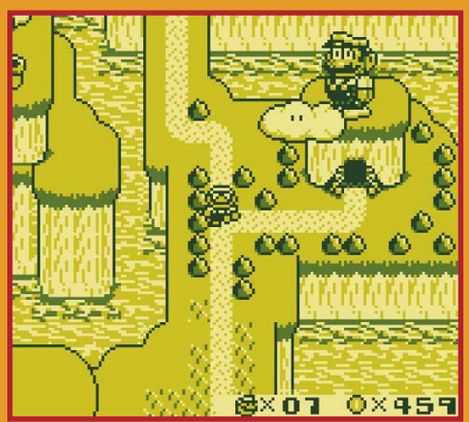
Within each zone are several individual levels, and most include secret levels that can be accessed through special hidden exits. The zones have unique and varied themes, and thematically linked enemies, some of which are exceedingly outlandish for a *Mario* game.

In Macro Zone, Mario is tiny, dwarfed by the world around him. Here he fights deadly ants equipped with head-mounted cannons, sentient screws and a deadly jack-in-the-box. Turtle Zone takes place inside a turtle, yet somehow contains an entire whale. Space Zone marks the first time Mario went to space, while Pumpkin Zone reveals new terrors in the form of vampires, witches, and an oddly masked ghoul. Mario Zone's levels run through the clockwork innards of an enormous Mecha-Mario.

Each zone ends with a boss fight, and these too are varied and interesting. There's an underwater battle against a giant octopus, a treetop duel with a just-hatched crow, a showdown with a sewer rat, and a fateful rematch with *Super Mario Land*'s villainous Tatanga. While these boss battles do fundamentally come down to jumping on a

MASTERING MARIO

YOU MUST BECOME THE PLUMBER



CHOOSE YOUR PATH

■ Players can choose to complete *Super Mario Land 2*'s zones in any order, and some are trickier than others. Start with an easy one to get your footing, like Tree Zone. After that, hitch a ride on a hippo's bubble and float through the relatively simple Space Zone.

HAVE PATIENCE

■ As with many *Mario* titles (and platformers in general), this game rewards patience. Enemies are often placed to catch you rushing, especially in trickier spaces like the swimming sections of Turtle Zone. Take your time, don't rush, and always look before you leap.

BUNNY POWER!

■ The most effective power-up in the game is certainly the Carrot, which transforms Mario into Bunny Mario, allowing him to jump higher and float gently to the ground. More than any other power-up, the Carrot slows things down and gives you time to think.

» [Game Boy] Collect all six coins to unlock the final level.

bad guy's head, they're at least thematically interesting and challenging. The adventure culminates in a legitimately difficult assault to retake Mario's castle, and a three-part fight with Mario's newest nemesis, Wario.

Wario was dreamed up by game designer Hiroji Kiyotake, best known at the time for designing *Metroid*'s Samus Aran, as a deliberate inversion of Mario. Even his name signals his antithetical nature: it's a mashup of 'Mario' and 'warui' the Japanese word for 'bad'. While Mario is selfless and heroic, Wario is greedy, selfish, crude and rude. He's an unapologetic ▶

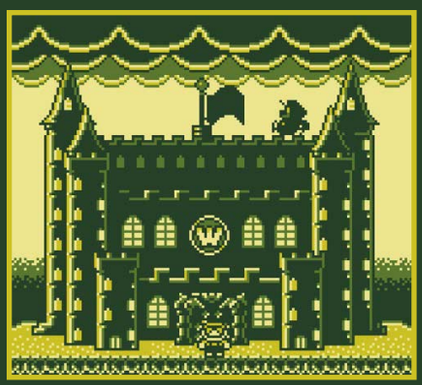
MEET WARIO

MARIO'S COMICAL DOPPELGANGER MAKES HIS DEBUT

■ *Super Mario Land 2* marks the very first appearance of Wario, Mario's bizarro rival. In this adventure, Wario's taken up residence in Mario's castle and magically enslaved the citizens of Mario Land. He is no match for our hero, of course, and by the end of the game we've booted him from the throne and tossed him out of Mario Land. But Wario's story doesn't end there.

In 1994, Wario became the star of his very own game, the sequel to *Super Mario Land 2* called *Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3*. In this game, Wario searches for treasure so that he can buy his very own castle (one even bigger than Mario's). *Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3* sold more than 5 million copies and launched a franchise that currently includes eight mainline games released across Nintendo's Game Boy, Game Boy Advance, Virtual Boy, GameCube, Wii, and Nintendo DS. Wario spin-offs exist, too, including the venerable *WarioWare Inc* series, comprised of 11 games.

All told, Wario has starred in 25 games since his creation in 1992 and has appeared in dozens of additional titles. An impressive run for a character originally conceived as nothing more than "a bad Mario".



» [Game Boy] Our first glimpse of Wario is his silly silhouette, strutting annoyingly atop Mario's castle.

FARMING FOR LIVES

■ *Super Mario Land 2* allows you to play any level you like, as many times as you like. This makes it easy to farm for coins or extra lives. Revisit simpler stages to build a stockpile of cash and lives, which you'll need for later boss fights.

IT'S NOT DARK SOULS

■ Each boss in *Super Mario Land 2* follows simple patterns with clear defensive openings. Spend the first few moments on defence, dodging and learning their patterns, then strike once you know their moves. In typical *Mario* fashion, most are defeated simply by bouncing on their heads.

EVERYONE HATES TATANGA

■ The final boss of the previous *Super Mario Land* game, our old friend Tatanga, appears in *Super Mario Land 2* as Space Zone's boss. In this low-gravity fight, he's extra annoying. Jump early to strike him on your downward travel or Mario will take damage.

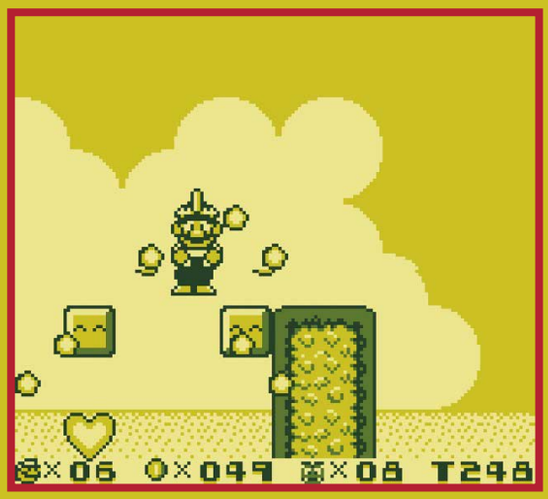
IS THAT LEGO?

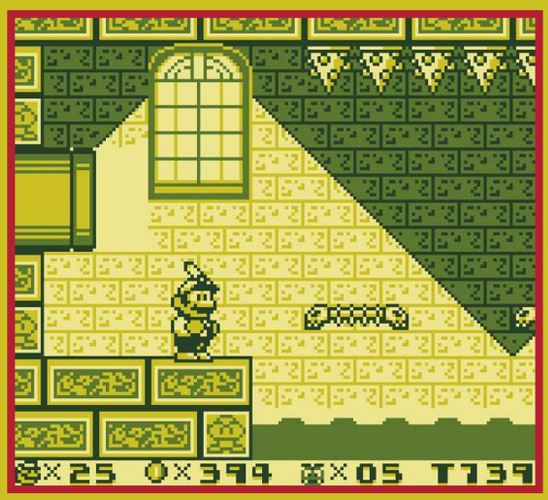
BUILDING BLOCKS FROM NINTENDO'S PAST

Today, Nintendo is known for its videogames. But long before the company had ever dreamed of Mario, it was in the toy business.

In 1966, Gunpei Yokoi (creator of the Game Boy) invented Ultra Hand, a plastic extendable grabber that sold over a million units. Its success helped Nintendo avoid financial ruin and prompted the creation of a dedicated department focussed on developing new toys. One such toy was 1968's Nintendo Block (N&B). The line-up included construction sets based on the Apollo missions, functional electronic clocks, a revolving gondola and more.

Lego sued Nintendo for patent violation, and despite Nintendo's victory in the case, Nintendo Block was discontinued in 1972. But the toy was not forgotten. One level in the Mario Zone of *Super Mario Land 2* is built around Nintendo's Lego-like blocks and even features the N&B logo as a subtle callback to the company's toy-making roots.

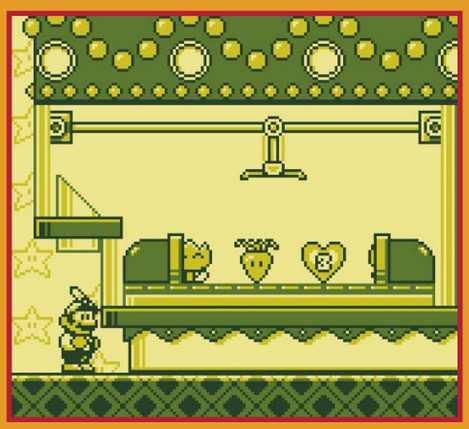


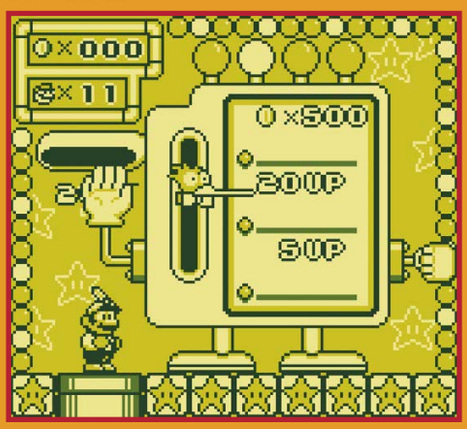


» [Game Boy] Wario's castle presents some major platforming challenges.

THIS MARIO'S DIFFERENT

NINTENDO R&D1'S UNIQUE APPROACH TO ITS MARIO SEQUEL





EASY MODE

Super Mario Land 2 was the first mainline *Mario* game to offer an Easy Mode, activated by pressing Select on the File Select screen. In Easy Mode, there are fewer enemies, Floating Faces can be defeated with one hit, and some platforming sections are easier.

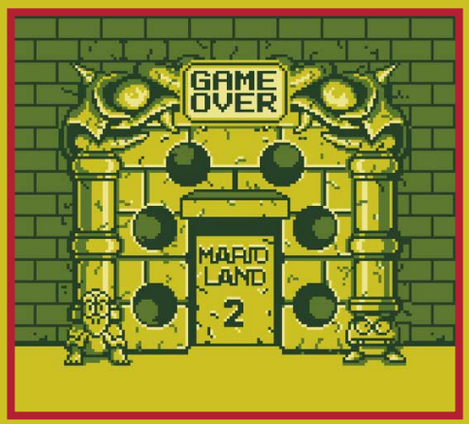
MICRO MINIGAMES

Many levels in *Mario Land 2* have an elevated bell hanging above the exit. Ringing this bell takes you to one of two different bonus games. One is a crane game, the other a follow-the-path game, and each can award bonus items or extra lives.

COIN COLLECTOR

In most *Mario* games, collecting 100 coins grants an instant 1-Up, but not in *Super Mario Land 2*. In this game, it's possible to collect up to 999 coins and spend them at the Mario Land casino, where slot machines grant various rewards.

» [Game Boy] Odd décor, for a guy who hates Mario.



» [Game Boy] Wait 2.5 minutes here for Totaka's secret song.

▶ self-server who wants money and status and doesn't care whom he harms to get them.

The character was also a statement of authorship for R&D1. Working as it was, in the shadow of Shigeru Miyamoto, Wario provided an opportunity to leave a distinct imprint on a franchise that didn't really belong to it. R&D1 took the company's most iconic hero and twisted him into a warped, villainous reflection. That Wario has seen such longevity and popularity stands as testament to the team's talent.

That talent comes through on the technical side, as well. Where *Super Mario Land* felt constrained by the Game Boy's relatively limited hardware, *Super Mario Land 2* feels expansive, with bigger sprites and environments packed with character and personality that was lacking in Mario's earlier Game Boy adventure.

The same can be said of the game's audio design. *Super Mario Land 2* makes the most of the Game Boy's famously limited audio capability, delivering a soundtrack by Kazumi Totaka that's both playful and extremely catchy. Rather than mimicking tunes from *Super Mario Bros* or the newer *World*, *Super Mario Land 2*'s music creates its own identity that perfectly matches the game's eclectic environments. (And, yes, Totaka's secret song is there too – hang out at the Game Over screen for a few minutes to hear the infamous hidden jingle.)

When *Super Mario Land 2: Six Golden Coins* debuted, it did so to near universal critical acclaim. *Nintendo Power* in the USA awarded it Best Overall Game (Game Boy) for 1992 while the British *Official Nintendo Magazine* ranked it 44th on its list of the 100 greatest Nintendo games. More recent reviews were similarly complimentary, with the 3DS port earning a 9/10 from Nintendo Life in 2012.

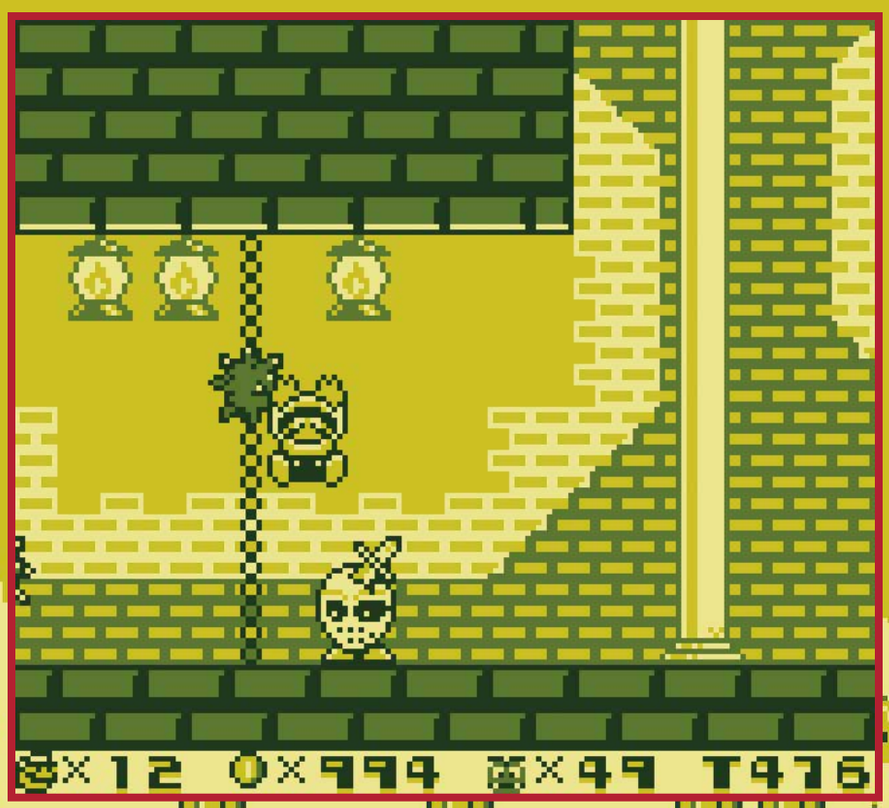
Within six months of release, *Super Mario Land 2: Six Golden Coins* sold over 5 million copies worldwide. In total, the game sold over 11 million copies, making it the fifth best-selling Game Boy game of all time (just behind the original *Super Mario Land*).

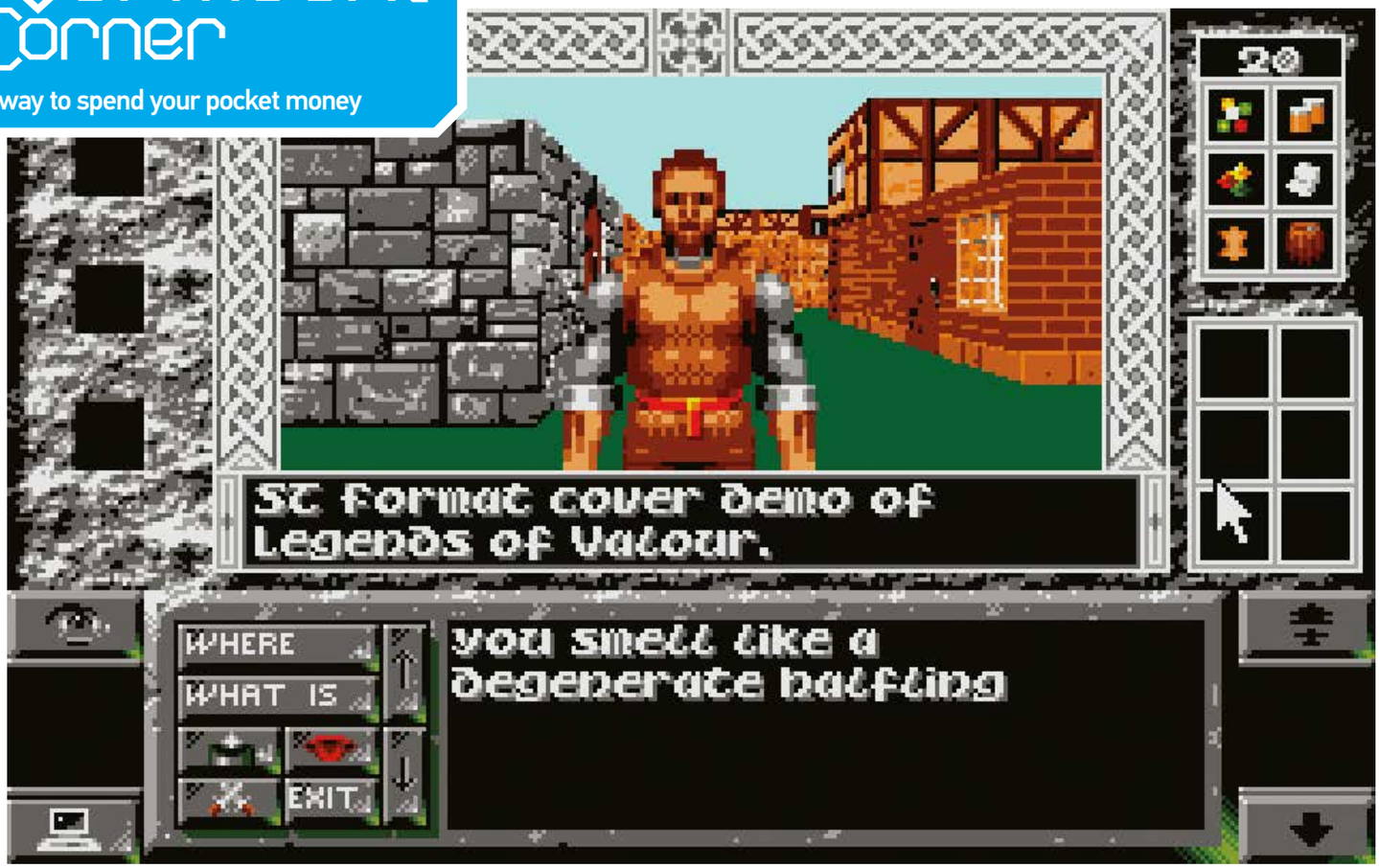
Today, it remains one of the most unusual and fascinating entries in the 2D *Mario* series. In an era of increasingly complex gameplay and overwhelmingly sprawling quests, *Super Mario Land 2* stands out as something refreshing; a concise, focussed, and inventive adventure that still feels like no other *Mario* title. ✱

"WHILE MARIO IS SELFLESS AND HEROIC, WARIO IS GREEDY, SELFISH, CRUDE AND RUDE"

STRANGE SPRITES

■ Director Hiroji Kiyotake wanted to create new sprites and abilities not found in earlier games. Fire Mario, identified by his colourful outfit in earlier titles, wears a feather in this grey-scale game while new power-ups include the flying Bunny Mario and floating Space Mario.





» [Atari ST] A bit of friendly banter never hurt anyone.

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING ST MAGAZINE
ST FORMAT
ISSUE 47 JUNE 1993
UPGRADE YOUR TOS
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COVER DISK 47
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THEN ASK YOUR NEWSAGENT FOR IT IMMEDIATELY
XENOMORPH
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ST FORMAT #47

THE LATEST GAMES HAD A THRILL FACTOR IN THE NINETIES, AND IN A LESS SATURATED MEDIA LANDSCAPE, A DEMO WOULD OFTEN BE YOUR FIRST GLIMPSE OF THEM IN ACTION. THIS MONTH'S BIG GAME WAS A MINOR TECHNICAL MARVEL, AND SHOWED THE ST COULD STILL SURPRISE

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

THIS MONTH IN JUNE 1993

ST Format was strikingly upbeat in June 1993. The Falcon launch had left it "optimistic about the future", feeling the ST line would be 'supported for years to come'. Things still looked good on the software front, with a *Legends Of Valour* demo proving the machine could still wow gamers. Reader David Singleton struck a more sceptical tone, describing Atari as having, "As much commercial acumen as a truffle." This would prove sadly prescient, with the Falcon discontinued later that year. With it, the ST era ended. Atari went all in with its next baby, the Jaguar.

THE MAIN EVENT: LEGENDS OF VALOUR

Synthetic Development's *Legends Of Valour* let players step into a whole new world. Exploring the town of Mitteldorf was jaw-dropping, with its texture-mapped 3D environments stunning players. You could explore freely, popping in and out of shops, interacting with the wandering citizens, or just gazing up at trees. You could chat to people, asking them for directions, or insulting them, which they'd often take issue with.

The late Ben Daglish's fabulous intro jangle sets the scene, though there's no in-game sound beyond the clunk of opening doors and the airy swings of your punches. Gameplay wise too, the demo is quite bare. Shops are unpopulated and there are no missions or story threads to follow. The taverns, hostels and the Institute Of Zoolatry all sit mysteriously empty. The user interface is crammed with intriguing buttons, but most have little use in the demo.

All you can really do is wander around, getting in punch-ups with the townsfolk and marvelling at the graphics, and the possibilities

» [Atari ST] If you throw out too many insults, you'll likely get punched,

» [Atari ST] The pubs are sadly empty in the demo.

» [Atari ST] The trees lend a bucolic feel to parts of the town.

of this sprawling town, with its locked gate and unknowable secrets.

Still, that's what a demo is for, to make you wonder about what's not there and leave you with an itch unscratched.

In the full game, you're stuck in a quarantined city trying to find your missing cousin Sven. There's also a day and night cycle, and you've got hunger, thirst and sleep to manage. Some compared it to *Elite* in the level of freedom given to the player.

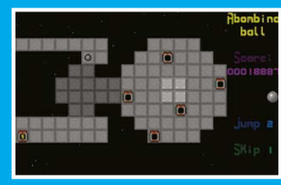
The final game was divisive, with many considering it one of the system's best, but others put off by its slow pace and difficulty. *ST Format* gave it 82% a few issues later, but *ST Review* rated it at an impressive 95%.

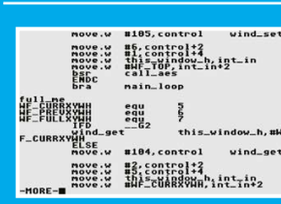
PLAY THIS NEXT: GALAXIAN

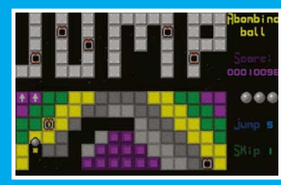
Scotland's Sinister Developments brought a number of arcade classics to the ST. *Centipede*, *Asteroids* and *Space Invaders* all got the nod. This excellent conversion of Namco's *Galaxian* looks and plays well, and has great intro music too, even if the in-game sound doesn't quite match the iconic drone of the swooping aliens in the original game. There's selectable difficulty, and as it's shareware, a five pound registration fee would get you a copy of the developer's next game. A tenner got you the source code, too. The enemies seem a little more aggressive than in the arcade, but in a MAME-free world the chance to play a solid rendition of a top arcade title was not to be passed up. ✱

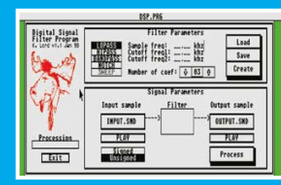
Covermount HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST OF THE REST









ABOMBINABALL

■ The first of two bird's-eye puzzlers on the disk, Martin Brownlow's *Abombinaball* has you jumping around the screen trying to diffuse bombs in the correct order. You destroy the tiles that you jump on and have limited jumps, meaning careful planning is needed.

Some tiles push you in specific directions, some can only be crossed a limited number of times before collapsing. A time limit makes things even trickier, but the password system makes for a surprisingly friendly game.

Its 50 creatively designed levels are well worth a play through, and feature a few cheeky cameos. There's even a lemming, and we do appreciate a game that puts Mr Pants in the high-score table.

STOMP

■ *Stomp* is a kind of action *Sokoban* where you move blocks around to spell out the word 'Stomp'.You can only move blocks across gaps towards other blocks, which makes things particularly fiendish. There are also wandering baddies, which send you on a tragic plunge into the void, if you snag them, but there's dynamite to help you get revenge, provided you don't blow yourself up. Harshly judged by creator Iain Melvin as, "The most annoying game I have ever produced and it gives even me headaches," it's actually fairly original. It has 35 levels and none are impossible according to the author. We'll have to take his word for it, but can confirm things get pretty hardcore by level two.

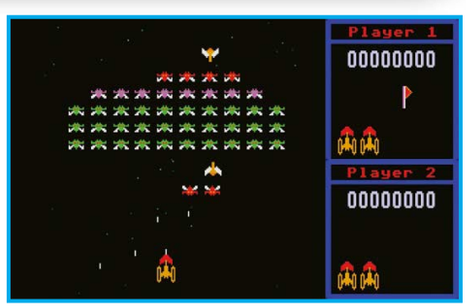
APPLICATIONS

■ *ST Format* covered both games and applications, and the disk included a selection of tools to let you explore the serious side of the machine. There was a sound processor to let musicians improve their sample quality, removing buzzes and hisses. There was a memory resident image tool that let you view various types of picture file and convert them into other formats.

There was a zip manager, that somewhat ironically required unpacking to a blank disk before use. A backup tool helped prevent any nasty accidents, and there was a useful memory display program, too. Finally, there was a free helping of assembler source code, to help budding coders learn more about what made the ST tick.

» [Atari ST] Two greens attack from the left-hand side as we nobble their chums in the middle.

» [Atari ST] The attract sequence features a continual cascade of diving aliens.



» [Atari ST] The aliens are leaving little room for escape here.

THE MAKING OF PUSH-OVER

THE EARLY NINETIES WERE HOME TO SOME PUZZLE GAMES THAT WERE AS INNOVATIVE AS THEY WERE UNUSUAL, SUCH AS THE LOST VIKINGS AND LEMMINGS. AND, OF COURSE, PUSH-OVER, WHICH ACHIEVED THE EXTRAORDINARY FEAT OF COMBINING THE SEEMINGLY INCOMPATIBLE WORLDS OF MYRMECOLOGY, DOMINOES AND SNACKS

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** RED RAT SOFTWARE
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC, SNES
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE GAME

***Push-Over* was created by Red Rat Software, a development studio founded in Manchester in 1985, and probably best known for its 1988 racing game *Lombard RAC Rally*.** However, the development of *Push-Over* was actually spread across several parties. It was conceived by Charles Partington and Harry Nadler, the founders of Red Rat Software, where much of the graphics and level design were also created. The game's publisher Ocean Software handled the full-screen animations, the music and the sound effects. And the programming, as well as part of the level design, was largely outsourced to external staff such as the couple Helen and Dave Elcock, as the two confirm to us, "We had developed a number of other titles with Red Rat Software, such as *Lombard RAC Rally*, *International Soccer Challenge* and *Wild Wheels*, so we knew them well. We made the PC, Amiga and Atari ST versions concurrently, and side by side with our friend Keith Watterson."

The game's development took about a year and a half in total, although according to Helen, the actual programming went very quickly, "It only took several months. We developed a level editor early on and the final things we worked on were the integration with Smiths Crisps."

Smiths Crisps? Well, for all intents and purposes, *Push-Over* is an advertising game for Smiths Crisps and its Quavers snacks, and the game features Colin Curly (a hyperactive cartoon dog designed by Bob Lawrie, and voiced by Lenny Henry). Promotion is everywhere in the game, including the intro, the main menu, at the end of every world and every cutscene. This is surprising, as the advertising deal arrived relatively late, as Helen confirms, "This was added after the fact. Red Rat Software were working with Ocean Software, and Ocean secured the deal with Smiths Crisps."

Push-Over hit the shops in late-1992, simultaneously for the Amiga, Atari ST and PC. All these versions are virtually identical in content (hence why we're not featuring our usual Conversion Capers panel). The later SNES release is quite different, and you can read more about it in The Rat Pack boxout.

The hero of *Push-Over* is a soldier ant called GI Ant, who was chosen by the Elcocks

» [Amiga] The charmingly animated intro really gets you in the mood for the game

HELEN ELCOCK

Helen programmed several versions of *Push-Over* and designed some of its levels. She works as an electronics designer and scuba diving instructor these days.

DAVE ELCOCK

Dave also programmed *Push-Over* and was involved in its level design. He still works as a software engineer and also as a scuba diving instructor, alongside Helen.

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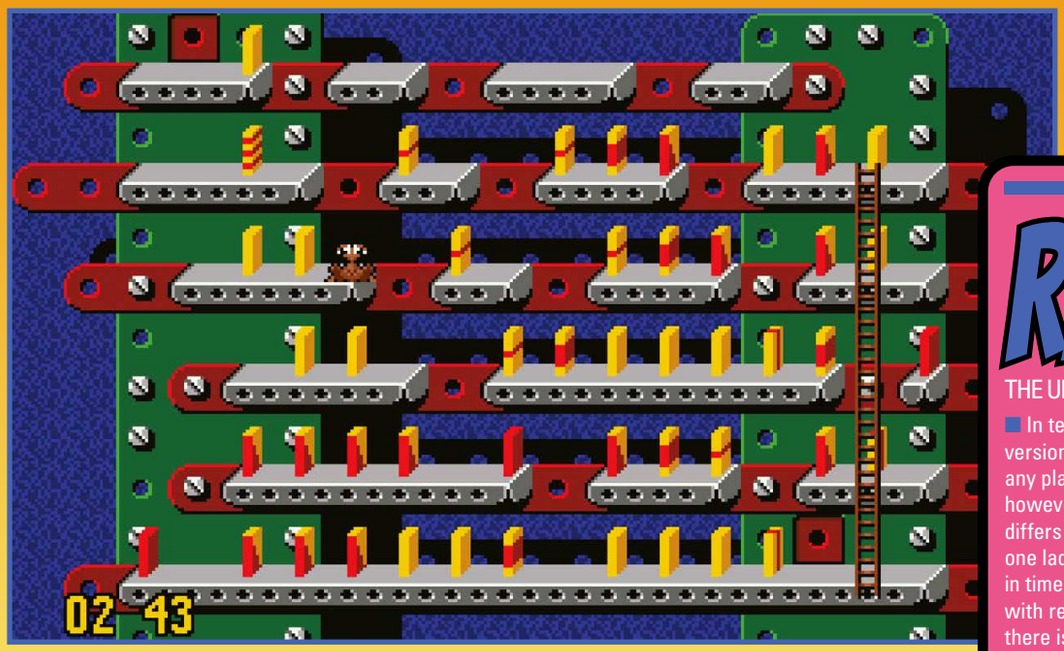
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LOMBARD RAC RALLY (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PC, AMIGA, ATARI ST
RELEASED: 1988

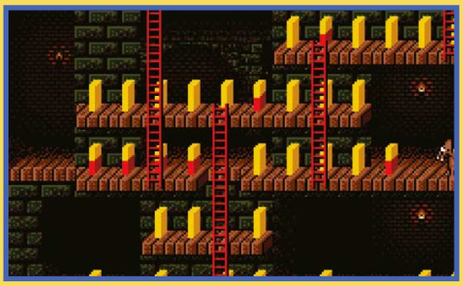
INTERNATIONAL SOCCER CHALLENGE
PLATFORM: PC, AMIGA, ATARI ST
RELEASED: 1990

WILD WHEELS
PLATFORM: PC, AMIGA, ATARI ST
RELEASED: 1991



» [Amiga] Each level fits on exactly one screen; there is never any scrolling.

» [Amiga] Some of the puzzles are very clever and require a lot of lateral thinking, especially in the later levels.



» [Amiga] The level design looks very complicated in places. Often, however, moving just one or two blocks is enough to solve the puzzle.

"because they are hardworking, small and strong for their size". His mate Colin Curly loves his Quavers, but foolishly loses them into an anthill, leaving GI Ant to plunge headfirst into the dark hill and start his unique, puzzle-based quest.

> "OCEAN SECURED THE DEAL WITH SMITHS CRISPS"
> HELEN ELCOCK

Every single one of *Push-Over*'s 100 levels is crammed with differently coloured dominos, whose fate, as we all know, is to clack over satisfyingly in a neat flow. However, there are a few rules to bear in mind here, as one specific tile, known as the Trigger, must be the very last to fall. Only when that happens will the door to the next level open. To achieve this, GI Ant must position the available tiles in such a way as to create a clattering cascade that ends only at the trigger, passing over both regular and special stones. The Exploder explodes on contact, tearing a hole in the floor, the Splitter, splits into two blocks, while the Stopper, true to its name, halts the movement of other blocks. All these tiles are very easy to tell apart as they are clearly colour-coded. The game's actual gameplay revolves around figuring out as quickly as possible where each block needs to be placed so that everything can be smoothly destroyed. It's all rather obvious at the beginning, but it quickly becomes quite wild and complex. To make matters more difficult, GI Ant is only allowed to knock over exactly one domino tile in each level. The manual explains that carrying and placing all the other dominoes uses up so much of GI Ant's strength that he only just has enough left for one final nudge.

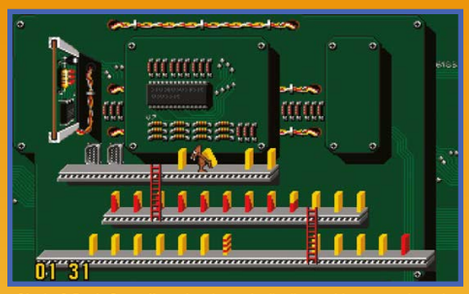
The main challenge of *Push-Over* lies in figuring out where the flaws in the domino chain are and correcting it by moving a few tiles. You shouldn't take too long over this, though, because there's a time limit to consider. In later levels, it's more the rule than the exception that, after placing the pieces and pushing the first brick on its merry way, your job is not done at all, as you have to sprint off immediately afterwards. Sometimes because this is the only way to reach the gate at the very last second. And sometimes because you simply cannot reach the goal any other way – for example if a Bridger tile blocks the only access to a lower level if you're too slow.

THE RAT PACK

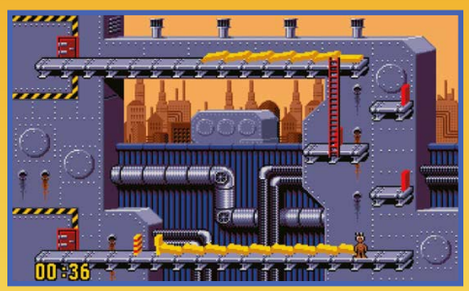
THE UNUSUAL SNES VERSION OF PUSH-OVER

In terms of content, all home-computer versions of *Push-Over* were identical, without any platform-specific levels. The SNES version, however, is a different beast. Firstly, Level 91 differs from all other versions in that it lacks one ladder, making it more difficult to complete in time. Secondly, this version lacks everything with regards to Colin Curly or Smiths Crisps, there is neither dog nor Quavers anywhere on the SNES. Instead, the game now revolves around GI Ant's superior, Captain Rat. Who hasn't lost any snacks, but… wads of cash. Which mainly means that all the animated clips have been changed and now centre on the helmeted rat. Or rather the animated clip, as there's only one now and you get to see the same one over and over again.

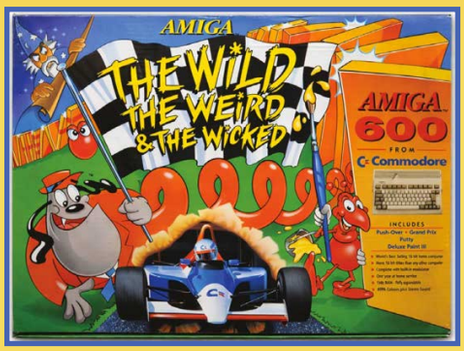
According to Helen, developing this version was technically interesting, but unfortunately didn't have a happy ending, "I programmed the SNES version using a development system that plugged into a SNES and a SNASM compiler. The SNES used a superset of the 6502 microprocessor, so I had to rewrite the game in assembler. That was fun, but unfortunately I never got paid for it as Red Rat Software went into receivership."



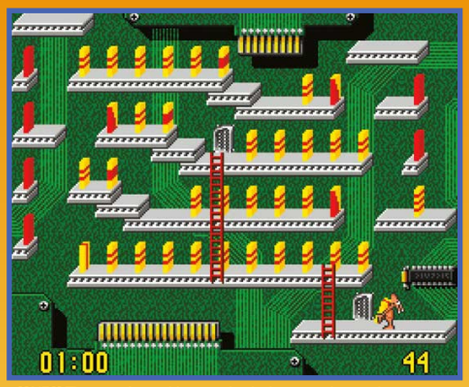
» [Amiga] *Push-Over* offers nine thematically diverse biomes, such as the Computer World.



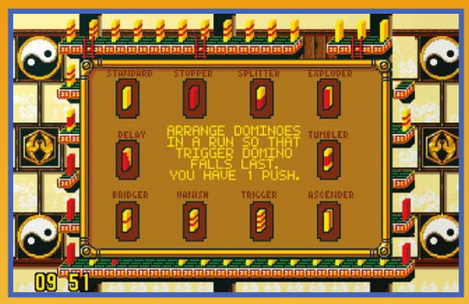
» [Amiga] There are few things more satisfying than watching neatly placed dominoes clack away.



» *Push-Over* was part of an Amiga 600 bundle called *The Wild, The Weird & The Wicked*, which included the computer, three games and Deluxe Paint 3.



» [SNES] The game's graphics are simple, but very clear and easy to read. The hero, GI Ant, is only a few pixels tall, but is nicely animated.



» [PC] You can take a closer look at the ten different stones either in the game's manual or its pause menu.

There are, however, plenty of ways to fail, for example by accidentally destroying dominoes. GI Ant, despite his very manly name, is not indestructible: he can only fall from a relatively short height before hitting the ground turns him into an ant skeleton. Thankfully, most levels are tough but fair. You can even continue playing after the timer has expired. You won't clear the stage, but you can at least work it out for your next attempt.

> "I STILL THINK IT'S A FUN GAME" HELEN ELCOCK

However, you also mustn't underestimate *Push-Over*. Because, particularly in the later stages, it often happens that whilst the blocks are falling, you have to keep running around and making adjustments in real time – for example, by repeatedly picking up the only Stopper tile you have and moving it several times. According to the Elcocks, the development of the tiles and the levels was a very organic process, "We developed the behaviour of the dominoes and the ant character, and then worked out the puzzles through experimentation. Once we had characterised the behaviour and worked out some of the basic puzzle mechanics, we set about arranging them so that they grew more complex as you progressed through the game."

Push-Over's nine worlds, each featuring eleven levels, offer plenty of variety. GI Ant begins in an industrial zone, and subsequently carries his dominoes through space, ancient Greece and a setting with a distinctly Japanese feel. Each level fits exactly onto one screen, there is never any scrolling. At the beginning, the domino fun takes place on one or two levels – but very quickly the tiles are spread across up to six levels, between which you climb via ladders. At the end of each completed world, you'll find one of the Quavers packets lost by Colin Curly. However, this is only if you've managed the final level of that world without using the in-game Tokens help system. If you find all of these packets, the secret 100th level will be unlocked. This

CRISPY COMPETITION

MORE GAMES LICENSED FROM CRISPS

ACTION BIKER 1985

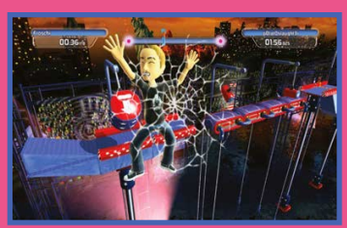
Mastertronic's *Action Biker* centres on Clumsy Colin, who was the face of the KP Skips advert. In the game, which was released on the 8-bit computers of the time, he races around a large obstacle course to collect new parts for his motorbike. It's a nice enough game, accompanied by some rather good music by Rob Hubbard.

ONE STEP BEYOND 1993

Following *Push-Over*, Colin Curly got his own adventure called *One Step Beyond*. This time, it wasn't about dominoes, but small platforms that had to be hopped on in a specific order to open the level exit in the form of a Quavers bag. The game was such a commercial flop that it dragged Red Rat Software down with it.

CHESTER CHEETAH: WILD WILD QUEST 1994

Chester Cheetah was the mascot for Cheetos in the Nineties, and as such was the subject of two games: *Chester Cheetah: Too Cool To Fool* (1992) and, two years later, *Wild Wild Quest* – both very forgettable platformers for the SNES and Mega Drive (the games were only released in North America).



DORITOS CRASH COURSE 2010

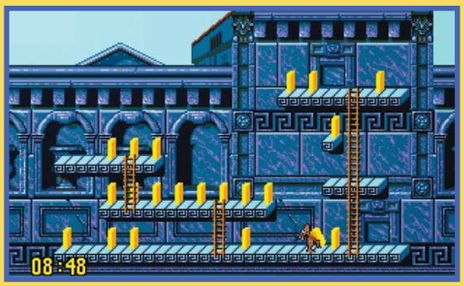
The only snack-themed game on this list that is even remotely modern is *Doritos Crash Course*, released for free on Xbox 360 in 2010. This is a Doritos-sponsored skill game in which you guide your Xbox avatar through crazy obstacle courses. It's still surprisingly entertaining.

» [Amiga] If you manage to get a packet of Quavers, this achievement is rewarded with a charming comic animation.

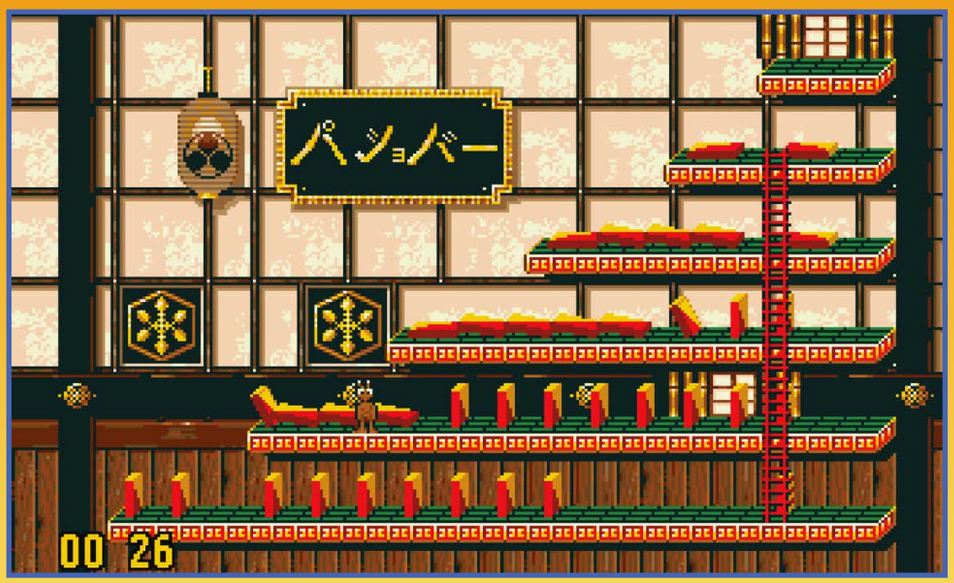
one presents a truly daunting challenge, as in this level all the dominoes look like regular yellow blocks – including all of the special tiles! This means you first have to try out every single block to figure out exactly what it does before you can place them in the correct order.

From a technical point of view, *Push-Over* is certainly not an outstanding game, but it fits neatly into the 'a bit like *Lemmings*' category. Everything is simple, pixelated, colourful and neat, and GI Ant's animations are really cute – the little rascal isn't even 20 pixels tall, but he has an impressive amount of facial expressions and gestures. For example, if he stands in front of an Exploder, he covers his ears, gritting his teeth and closing his eyes. Or he frantically waves his arms about when he's about to lose his balance at the edge of a platform. Or he grumbles at the player if they take too long. The password screen is also a beauty, featuring an army of ants laboriously carrying the individual blocks of the five-digit level codes into view.

On the other hand, the game offers very stylish full-screen animations. It starts right from the fantastic introduction in which the 'PUSHOVER' logo is knocked over by the clumsy GI Ant, with him leaving the scene terribly embarrassed afterwards. This is immediately followed by a short cartoon explaining Colin Curly's snack-related mishap – superbly animated, and also the main reason for the game being released on two floppy disks rather than just one. It could almost have been even more, as Helen tells us, "The game's graphics were created at Red Rat by Bryan King and Barry Armstrong. They



» [PC] You only get to see Level 100 if you've found all the Quavers. This level is a real challenge, as all the special tiles are neutral in colour.

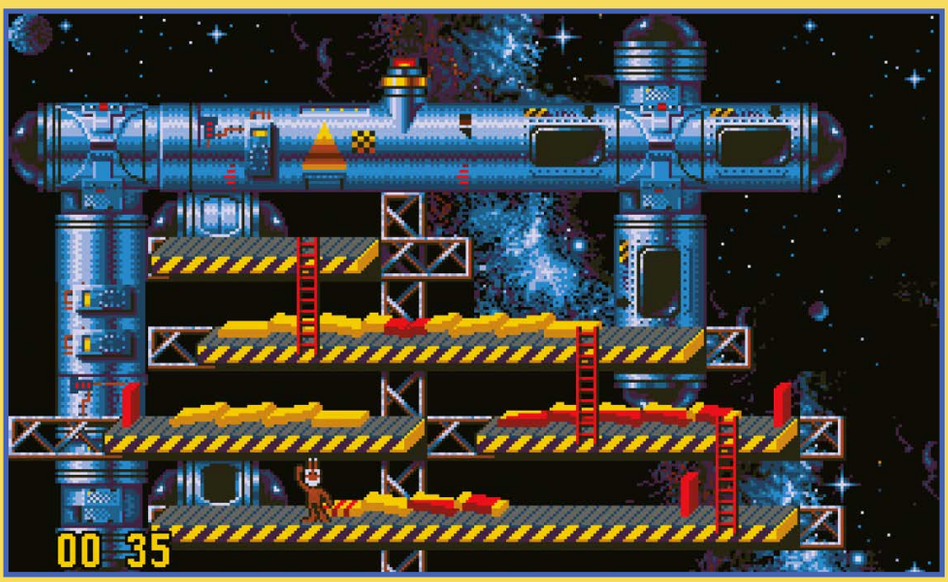


» [Amiga] A cute detail: in some levels of the Japan World, the name of the game is written in Katakana on the wall.

spent a lot of time making graphic blocks that needed to be 17 pixels wide for aesthetic reasons. Keith Watterson then spent a lot of time correcting them back down to 16 bits, as otherwise we would have had to move 32 bits, ie twice as much data."

Following its release (which was celebrated by magazines such as *Amiga Format* and *Amiga Action* with review scores in the high 80s), *Push-Over* was actually supposed to receive an add-on disk featuring 100 new levels, but this was unfortunately never realised. Instead, Red Rat Software threw itself into the quasi-sequel *One Step Beyond*, which was to become the company's final game – more on this in the Crispy Competition panel. Following the development of the SNES version of *Push-Over*, the Elcocks took this opportunity to bid farewell to game development, "We only ever worked in the industry part-time. After being left short-changed, we went back to our real jobs."

And unfortunately, GI Ant was never seen again after that either. But at least the original game has been available to buy without any hassle on GOG or Steam for some time now. And you can still enjoy it just as much as you did over 30 years ago: the clever gameplay hasn't lost any of its appeal, the graphics are still charming and lovingly crafted, the soundtrack is quite excellent, and the difficulty level pleasantly balanced. *Push-Over* may look simple, but it offers remarkably deep gameplay. And it also teaches a very important lesson: ant hills consist of crazy domino worlds inside! To sum it up with the words of Helen Elcock, "I still think it's a fun game." ✱



» [Amiga] The Space World is not only a visual treat but also an auditory highlight: the game's music is absolutely brilliant here!

09

Bomberman Hero

"THAT'S SOME VERY EXPENSIVE CARDBOARD"

» NINTENDO 64 » 1998 » A.I CO LTD

Generally, I don't buy loose cartridges. I get the appeal of them and they're certainly the cheapest way to enjoy the classics if you can't afford the higher prices that complete games can sell for, but they're generally not for me.

Nick was always a firm believer that simply being able to play a game was enough and while he had lots of complete games, his collection was filled with a wild assortment of cartridges, covering everything from the Game Gear to the NES. He'd sometimes look at either upgrading games he liked, or would just be curious about what a complete game would cost and would always say, "That's some very expensive cardboard," or, "That's some very expensive plastic," if the game was still sealed. I've been keeping my eye on *Bomberman Hero* for a while, but I've never seen the US version sell on eBay for less than £150. The Japanese version is far cheaper of course, but due to the game's focus on story I decided against buying it as I felt I'd be missing out. In the end, I simply grabbed a loose US cartridge on eBay for just over £20.

If you've not played it before, A.I Co's game is surprisingly good fun and it's a world away from *Bomberman 64*, which is effectively a 3D version of the older games in the series. *Hero* is more of a platformer, which instantly puts it up against a bunch of classic N64 games. While it's not a patch on the likes of *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Super Mario 64* or *Rocket: Robot On Wheels*, I've still been having a lot of fun with it and I've been enjoying the direction the developer decided to take the series.

As a result I've been eyeing up boxed copies again now, as I like the idea of owning a complete version of the game, but whenever I do I can hear Nick's voice in my head telling me, "That's some very expensive cardboard you're buying, Darran". Maybe just the game on its own is enough, after all, it certainly wasn't a problem for Nick. ✱

id

The progenitor of Wolfenstein 3D, Doom and Quake, id Software is the company that invented the first-person shooter and went on to bring us such (apparently) modern gaming phenomena as LAN-based and online multiplayer, esports and modding. This year, it turned 35, and this is its story

WORDS BY STEVE BOXER

On 1 February 1991, four men embarked on a path that – unbeknownst to them and the rest of the world – would end up playing a huge part in defining the world of videogames as we know it today. That was the day when John Romero, John Carmack, Tom Hall and Adrian Carmack officially established id Software, having broken away from their previous employer, Softdisk.

In 1991, id Software invented the first-person shooter. And in the next few years, it would go on to create the first multiplayer games, sow the seeds for esports and modding, and generate technology whose DNA still lives on in the likes of Unreal Engine, thereby underpinning a vast selection of today's AAA games. It wouldn't be unduly hyperbolic to assert that without id Software, there would be no *Call Of Duty* or *Fortnite*.

This year, id Software turned 35 years old, so in celebration of that, we caught up with a selection of the company's alumni and set them off on a series of nostalgia trips.

Imagine, as a developer, having to churn out a new game every month? It's a concept which sounds laughable in this age when, say, Rockstar can spend well over a decade making *GTA VI*, but it's a situation in which John Romero found himself as the Eighties melted into the Nineties. Joining Softdisk, which made monthly subscription games magazines with game disks on the cover, he found himself making games to a monthly deadline, but swiftly got fed up with that restriction. "So I told the president that I wanted to take off, go to LucasArts and make games all day long. He said, 'How about we start a game disk, and that will be yours.' I was like, 'Alright: let's do it.' And I said, 'I need two months, and I need a team, probably three or four people.' And he said, 'OK, you get a team and you get a game every two months.' So that became Gamer's Edge."

Romero set about recruiting a team. "One of my games was on a disk with a John Carmack game, and I could tell that it was really well

GAMES TO DISCOVER

KEY TITLES BY THE FPS GIANT

HOVERTANK ONE

PC, 1991

■ A bit jerky, and you're piloting a tank (depicted only via a reticule), but it looks like an FPS. The first one ever?

CATACOMB 3-D

PC, 1991

■ Romero reckons this was the first FPS, even though you play a mage – it features texture-mapping and smooth 3D.

DANGEROUS DAVE IN THE HAUNTED MANSION

PC 1991

■ This is the best iteration of Romero's platformer, made with Carmack's smooth-scrolling engine.

COMMANDER KEEN IN GOODBYE, GALAXY!

PC 1991

■ Designed by Tom Hall, this is the best release of the much-loved platform series.

WOLFENSTEIN 3D

PC, VARIOUS, 1992

■ For our money, the first proper, fully-formed FPS, with a selection of guns and Nazis to shoot. Jaw-droppingly revolutionary at the time.

» [PC] *Hovertank One*'s intro screen: one of the first stabs at a modern first-person shooter?

» [PC] *Catacomb 3-D*: no guns yet, but this is the first proper FPS according to John Romero.

programmed and everything, so I interviewed him, and he accepted the offer to come and work on my game disk." Romero added Adrian Carmack, then an intern, and Lane Roathe to handle the business side, and the team was complete.

It wasn't long, at least the way John tells it, before the magic started to happen. "1 September 1990 was the first day that John and I and Adrian started to work together. Then we had to divide up our work: I was like, 'OK, I like everything, so I'll just let John tell me what he likes.' And he liked engine architecture, and graphics. So I said, 'You can do that and I'll do everything else, and Adrian's going to do our art.' That's how everything started at id Software, basically."

> "I told the president that I wanted to take off, go to LucasArts and make games all day long"
> **John Romero**

It wasn't long before John Carmack's nascent prowess as a genius-level engine programmer began to assert itself. At the time, smooth side-scrolling couldn't be done on the PC. But Carmack soon created an engine that cracked the conundrum, and with Tom Hall, then making Apple II games at Softdisk, made a demo for Romero. "The demo that was made to show me smooth-scrolling was called *Dangerous Dave In Copyright Infringement*, because they put together a demo of the first level of *Super Mario*, but they used my Dangerous Dave character, because I'd made all the animations. They worked through it together in about six hours."

At that point, John realised both that John Carmack was a game-engine genius, and that him and his team had a way out of Softdisk that would become id Software, "When I saw pixel-by-pixel moving across the screen on PC, that had never been done before on a PC, and I knew it. That was so shocking – it was 1990, the PC had been out for nine years, and no one had done it; this guy did it within a month of me challenging him to do it."

The Gamer's Edge team started churning out games – *Dangerous Dave* was already a hit, and *Dangerous Dave 2: Dave In The Haunted Mansion* was made with the smooth-scrolling engine, while Romero also name checks Carmack's *Catacomb*, his earlier game *Pyramids Of Egypt*, shooter *Slordax* and the horizontal-scrolling ninja game *Shadow Knights* from that era.

But a new genre was about to be established: what we now know as the FPS. John continues the story. "Now we're in 1991, and in 1991, we made 13 games. These games took two months to make, so we made two of them at the same time."

Among the games made in that prolific burst of creativity was what some people argue was the first first-person shooter: *Hovertank One*. *Hovertank One* is super-basic, but it indisputably has that recognisable into-the- ▶

» [PC] The credits screen from *Commander Keen 4*: id's original team takes shape.

» [PC] *Commander Keen 4* added some pseudo-3D visual effects.

■ American McGee started at id Software as tech support, but soon worked on level design. He retired from games in 2023.

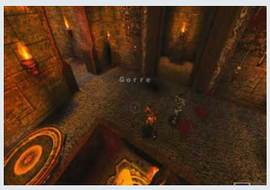
■ Todd Hollenshead was id Software's CEO and president. He's now head of publishing at Sabre Interactive.

DOOM
PC, VARIOUS, 1993
■ The game that propelled the FPS into the stratosphere: super-slick, gory action involving a Space Marine shooting squelchy demons.

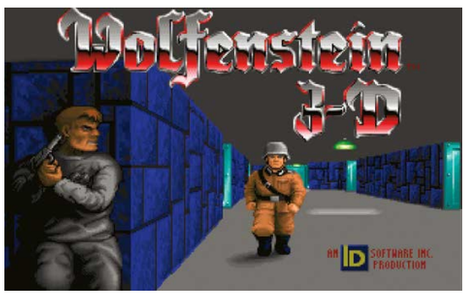
DOOM II
PC, VARIOUS, 1994
■ More *Doom*, but with larger, less-linear levels and refined LAN-based multiplayer: perhaps overlooked nowadays.

QUAKE
PC, 1996
■ Introduced online multiplayer to the world. Cemented id's reputation as one of the world's hottest developers.

QUAKE II
PC, VARIOUS, 1997
■ Another classic, with the war against the machine/alien Strogg providing a semblance of a storyline, atypically for an id game.



QUAKE III ARENA
PC, VARIOUS, 1999
■ After much internal debate, it was multiplayer-only – but set a benchmark for such games that many would argue still hasn't been matched.



» [PC] *Wolfenstein 3D*'s intro screen: nobody objects to shooting Nazis.

▶ screen 3D FPS perspective. So would John class it as the first FPS? "*Hovertank* was our first 3D game. But we didn't count *Hovertank* as a first-person shooter, because you're a tank, you're not a person – there was no gun."

However in the team's eyes, another of those 1991 games was the first FPS. "Six months later we did *Catacomb 3-D* which actually was the very first first-person shooter. We made it in two months, continues John. "It was first-person; you're shooting fireballs – you're not shooting guns yet. But you are a person: you're a mage, and you shoot fireballs, and nukes and all kinds of stuff – it's basically like *Gauntlet* in 3D. And we texture-mapped the walls."

For us, it was the next game the team made that properly established the FPS blueprint, with proper guns on view. John says, "Then, right after that, our next game was *Wolfenstein 3D*. That was VGA, much better rendering, now there were guns, and we were killing people. We fixed the weirdness in [*Catacomb 3-D*'s] rendering and the feel of movement. So it definitely got better, and *Doom* is where it really got refined."

Wolfenstein 3D was mind-blowing at the time: moving into and around the screen in full 3D was simply unheard-of. And, as John explains, it was the first game that the id Software team of Romero, John Carmack, Tom Hall and Adrian Carmack, alongside newly recruited business guy Jay Wilbur, had made for themselves. "In 1991, we left Softdisk at the end of January – February 1 we called our Founding Day, because that was the first time we didn't work for anyone else. But until the middle of 1991, we were making games for Softdisk. In June, that's when we started working on our own games for id Software, which were *Commander Keen 4*, *5* and *6*. But at the same time we were still making games for Softdisk."

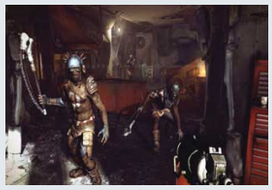
Catacomb 3-D was one of the last of those, and at last, the team could take longer than just two months making *Wolfenstein 3D*. But old habits die hard, apparently, as John explains. "From the beginning of *Wolfenstein 3D* to shipping the shareware was four months. All of us loved *Castle Wolfenstein* – that was such a great game from 1981 – and to make a 3D version of that would be so cool. But yeah, it was a big deal when we made *Wolfenstein*, because we didn't have time limits and we were making it just for us."

After *Wolfenstein 3D*, id Software began to acquire superstar-developer status, and *Doom*, released in 1993, cemented that. The id Software team began to grow – Kevin Cloud arrived to help Adrian Carmack with the art side, while Tom Hall left in 1993 and was replaced by Sandy Petersen and Dave Taylor. John says, "After *Doom* came out, it was like making *Star Wars* or something – it was crazy. We were really busy making *Doom II*, but we

» [PC] *Maze War* and *Spasim* may have come first, but *Wolfenstein 3D* was the first fully-formed FPS, complete with guns.

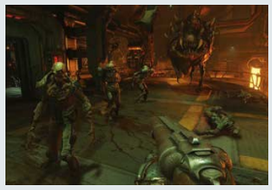
DOOM 3
PC, VARIOUS, 2004

■ This was another critical and commercial success for id Software and was followed by the expansion *Resurrection Of Evil* in 2005.



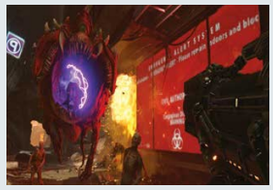
RAGE
PC, VARIOUS, 2011

■ John Carmack's last id game added vehicles to the FPS mixer, generating a *Mad Max* sort of vibe. A sequel, by id and Avalanche Studios, arrived in 2019.



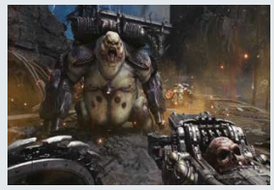
DOOM
PC, VARIOUS, 2016

■ An object lesson in how to reboot a classic: Mars, Hell and demons never looked so good. It's also jam-packed with numerous id-referential Easter eggs.



DOOM: ETERNAL
PC, VARIOUS, 2020

■ Also known as the parkour *Doom*: id built on the *Doom* reboot by placing more emphasis on movement and platforming. To the joy of some fans, but by no means all.



DOOM: THE DARK AGES
PC, VARIOUS, 2025

■ This was the shield and dragon one: a shield with a built-in chainsaw brought some great new gameplay, but the dragon-riding sequences were less popular.

> After Doom came out, it was like making Star Wars or something – it was crazy
> **John Romero**

» [PC] *Doom*: taking on demons, introducing fragging and gibbing to the masses.

» [PC] The first appearance of that familiar sludgy id Software colour-palette.

» [PC] One thing id always nails is the satisfying feel of weapons.

were also busy with the world coming at us. There were so many articles and interviews."

Carmack's technological innovation, if anything, accelerated. *Doom* introduced LAN-based multiplayer to the world – John Romero says it was added to *Doom* in October 1993, right at the end of the development cycle. "To play at home remotely, at super-high speed – that just didn't happen. That was just one of the things – modding started with *Doom*. Speedrunning started with *Doom*, because now you could record and play back all your gameplay, and people could compete with each other."

American McGee joined id Software in 1992, initially as tech support, but swiftly moving to level design. He provides an insight into the company's growing superstar status. "In the build-up for *Doom II*, it was already starting to feel like id were on a different level, and had a rockstar sort of status within the game development community. When beta testing and internet testing started up on *Quake*, that was when we really started getting a sense of how much of an impact it was making: we'd get letters from university professors around the world begging us not to release those tests right before finals, because they were having a dramatic impact on people's scores. You could feel the energy in the office, and you could feel the energy online related to what was happening."

In 1997, your correspondent (already a big fan of id Software at this point) had the privilege of experiencing that energy for myself. Assigned with the task of playing through *Quake II* for the first review (the cover story of the next issue of *PC Gamer*), I pitched up at id's then-HQ, a somewhat forbidding black glass cube named Suite 666 in Mesquite, a suburb of Dallas.

There I was greeted by a slightly discombobulated Todd Hollenshead, then a very youthful CEO. Although *Quake II* had gone gold the previous week, John Carmack, in his ceaseless quest to advance the boundaries of games technology, had added something to the game which rendered ▶

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

WHAT HAVE THE MAJOR PLAYERS BEEN UP TO SINCE LEAVING ID SOFTWARE?

JOHN CARMACK

One of the game's industry's greatest ever technological brains made a radical move in 2013 after leaving id Software: to become chief technology officer of Oculus, where he took Palmer Luckey's idea for a VR headset and actually made it work, fuelling the VR boom which persists today. He left Oculus in 2022 to found an Artificial General Intelligence company, Keen Technologies. Tim Willits wryly says, "Rumour has it he's programming Skynet."

JOHN ROMERO

After leaving id Software in 1996 after clashing with John Carmack, Romero set up Ion Storm in Dallas with Tom Hall, funded lavishly by Eidos. Ion Storm made four games including the disastrous *Daikatana*, the *Quake II*-engine RPG *Anachronox* and the all-time classic *Deus Ex*. In 2001, he and Hall founded mobile game developer Monkeystone, and in 2003, he joined Midway to work on *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows*. In 2015, he established Romero Games with his wife Brenda, also a renowned developer. He continues to make games and says, "I'm working on a shooter, and there's nothing to announce yet."

TIM WILLITS

After running id following the departure of John Carmack and Todd Hollenshead in 2013, Willits left the company in 2019, a decade after its acquisition by Zenimax. He became Saber Interactive's chief creative officer, and was joined by Todd Hollenshead, who is Saber's head of publishing. Under the pair, Saber is becoming an increasingly influential force in game publishing, with *Hellraiser*, *Turok*, *Jurassic Park* and *John Wick* games on the way. Willits says, "30 million-plus people played *World War Z*, and *Space Marine 2* has passed 12 million in sales: that's sold more than any id game I ever made."

DOOM II(tm), Hell on Earth
created by id Software and distributed by GT interactive
Thanks for purchasing DOOM II. We hope you have as much fun playing it as we had making it. If you don't, then something is really wrong with you and you're different and strange. All your friends think DOOM II is great.
Of course, DOOM II is a trademark of id Software, copyright 1994-95, so don't mess with it. Remember, if you are playing a pirated copy of DOOM II you are going to HELL. Buy it and avoid an eternity with all the other freeloaders. If you have any problems playing DOOM II, please call our technical support line at (212) 686-9432.
DOOM II WAS CREATED BY id SOFTWARE:
Programming: John Carmack, John Romero, Dave Taylor
Art: Adrian Carmack, Kevin Cloud
Design: Sandy Petersen
BIZ: Jay Wilbur

» [PC] *Doom II*'s credits show that id's team was already growing.

» [PC] *Quake*'s familiar options screen: bringing multiplayer to the masses.

it unplayable, then gone home to sleep like Rip van Winkle. Todd eventually raised him, *Quake II* was fixed and after a day of pretending to be a tourist in Dallas, I started playing through it (swiftly realising it was every bit as slick and forward-looking as you would expect an id Software game to be) – while getting to know some of the team.

> "Do we have a proprietary advantage, or are we giving it away like the secret formula for Coke?
> **Todd Hollenshead**

John Romero, by then, had left to set up Ion Storm in downtown Dallas with Tom Hall, but Adrian Carmack was still there, along with Kevin Cloud. The team had swollen to around 13 people, including the likes of Tim Willits – now running Saber Interactive with Hollenshead – and American McGee, who after being sacked from id soon after would achieve fame in his own right via his *Alice* games for Electronic Arts.

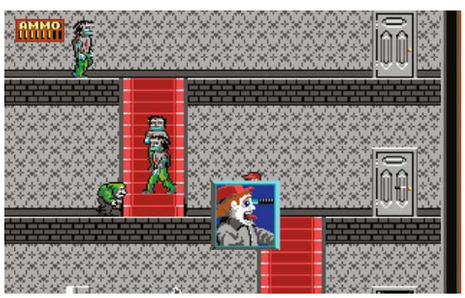
There was definitely a family feel to the team, which was somewhat demob-happy after finishing *Quake II* – the previous week, they had amused themselves with a drag race against Mesquite Police at Mesquite Airport, and we did two photo-shoots, one on the building's roof and one at a nearby Hooters.

Fun was definitely had at id. American reminisces about going to parties at the castle Richard Garriott – Lord British of *Ultima* fame – had built in Austin, going on tour with Nine Inch Nails who made the music for *Quake*, and, "I remember one time going with Carmack to Vegas because he wanted to see whether or not he could be successful at counting cards – it was just the two of us."

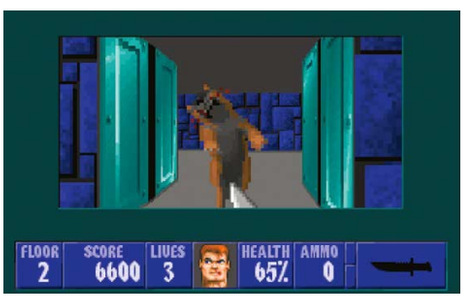
One of id Software's greatest creations – *Quake III Arena* – was still to come. Tim Willits, who emerged from the *Doom* modding scene to join the company in 1995 and first worked on the retail release of *Ultimate Doom*, fingers *Quake III Arena* as the best game he worked on at id. "*Quake III* is the ultimate; if you want to go one-on-one with somebody in a peer, skill-based deathmatch, *Quake III* is absolutely perfect. Everything is balanced perfectly, the maps are amazing, any mistake and you will lose. It is literally the most perfectly crafted game ever made, and nothing has come close to it."

Post-*Quake*, id Software's already huge influence on the wider games industry increased further. John Romero says that id Software had licensed its engines from the one that powered *Commander Keen 4*

DNA OF ID SOFTWARE
WHAT MADE THE STUDIO TICK?



PC GAMES
■ Even before id Software was incorporated, its founders concentrated on making PC games. Tom Hall moved over from making Apple II games, but from 1991 onwards, the company focussed on advancing the technological boundaries of PC games. Later, id Software's games were ported to consoles with some success, but the company remained PC-first.



INVENTING THE FPS
■ Whether you believe that the first first-person shooter was *Maze War*, *Hovertank One*, *Catacomb 3-D* or *Wolfenstein 3D*, id Software indisputably invented the first-person shooter. John Romero classes *Catacomb 3-D* as the first FPS, even with its mage character. We still argue that *Wolfenstein 3D*, with its human, gun-toting character, was the first fully formed FPS.

POPULARISING MULTIPLAYER GAMING
■ *Doom* was the first game to incorporate multiplayer as we now know it, via network play – remember LAN parties? Without *Doom*, those would never have happened. And *Quake* advanced things by bringing remote, internet-based online play across country boundaries to the party.

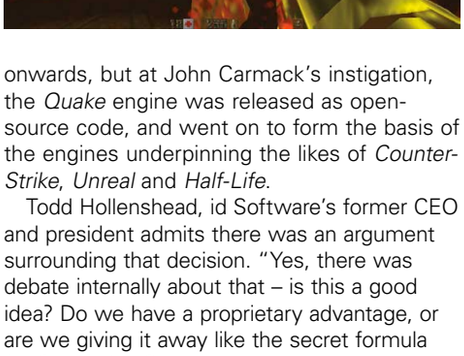
onwards, but at John Carmack's instigation, the *Quake* engine was released as open-source code, and went on to form the basis of the engines underpinning the likes of *Counter-Strike*, *Unreal* and *Half-Life*.

Todd Hollenshead, id Software's former CEO and president admits there was an argument surrounding that decision. "Yes, there was debate internally about that – is this a good idea? Do we have a proprietary advantage, or are we giving it away like the secret formula for Coke? But Carmack made the argument that, 'This is an ecosystem play. I'm releasing the source code so that all of these people out there will have a preference for id engineering code. That they'll kind of grow up on it, learn to modify it and do all the cool stuff with it.'"

Tim Willits adds, "I'm joking, but John and Todd retired from the company, and those two fuckers left me in charge. Then, I spent years and years chasing after people who were making *Doom* and *Quake* shit and selling it online for a profit, and I had to stop them. And I thought, 'Oh my God, I'm going to get a time machine and I'm going to go back in time and I'm going to punch Carmack in the nose.'"

Bethesda Softworks' parent company Zenimax bought id Software in 2009, while Hollenshead and John Carmack left in 2013. Under Willits, who left in 2019, id Software ploughed on with *Rage* and *Rage 2*, as well as 2016's rather excellent but underrated *Doom* reboot. And the company still operates under Bethesda, mainly as the keeper of the rebooted *Doom* franchise, via 2020's *Doom: Eternal* and 2025's *Doom: The Dark Ages*. The much admired MachineGames, meanwhile, keeps the *Wolfenstein* flame alive.

Willits, Hollenshead, McGee and Romero all go out of their way to assert that they've continued to root for all of id Software's games even after leaving the company. Willits, meanwhile, when asked to look back on highlights of his time there, tells a story that brought home to him just how great an impact his and his colleagues' endeavours once had. "I was in Australia, of all places, in just a random bar, and this guy came up to me and said *Quake* changed his life. I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'Well, I was having it rough, and I didn't know what to do, and I felt that there was no way forward for me in my life. And I started playing *Quake*, and I met some friends, and we started playing together, and I met this girl, and we fell in love.' And he goes, 'You don't understand: this saved my life,' and he was in tears. And I realised that we were actually doing something that has helped change people's lives – that the world then was shrinking, that we were bringing people together. It was moments like that which made it all really worth it." ✱



» [PC] Unlike the original game, *Quake II* had more sci-fi leanings and didn't feel as medieval-based as the first game.

» [PC] The reboot of *Doom* in 2016 proved that id Software still knew how to make exciting first-person shooters.

ENCOURAGING MODDING

■ Even before id Software released the *Quake* engine as open-source code, a modding scene had arisen around *Doom*. The ahead-of-its-time *Quake* engine was further enhanced by the likes of Epic MegaGames and Valve to form the basis of world-class franchises like *Unreal*, *Half-Life* and *Portal*; all Unreal Engine games contain some id Software DNA.

THE ESPORTS SCENE

■ In 1997, Dennis 'Thresh' Fong, one of the world's first pro gamers, won John Carmack's old Ferrari 328 at the Red Annihilation tournament, playing *Quake*. The annual QuakeCon festival and tournament was established in 1996 and, astonishingly, still takes place. Thresh also invented the WASD convention of PC game keyboard movement.

THE EVOLUTION OF YAKUZA

IT'S AN EPIC DECADES-SPANNING CRIME SAGA. A SERIES OF TENSE AND TWISTY UNDERWORLD THRILLERS FULL OF MELODRAMA, TRAGEDY, AND STOMACH-CHURNING VIOLENCE. IT'S ALSO THE SERIES WHERE YOU CAN RUN A REAL ESTATE COMPANY WITH A CHICKEN. VETERANS MASAYOSHI YOKOYAMA, HIROYUKI SAKAMOTO AND RYOSUKE HORII EXPLAIN HOW THEY COMBINED THE SUBLIME AND THE RIDICULOUS

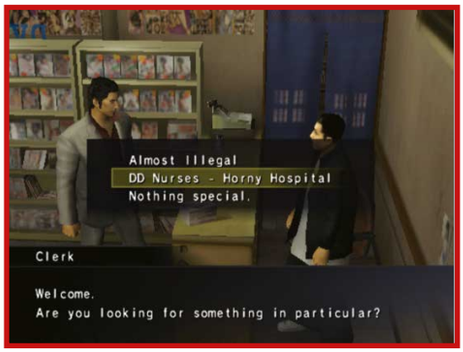
WORDS BY ABBIE STONE INTERVIEWS BY NICK THORPE

» [PlayStation 2] Kiryu has to compete in a secret underground fighting ring to get information.

***Created by Toshihiro Nagoshi, Yakuza* is one of the great anecdote games.** Talk to anybody who's played one and they'll tell you tales of how they helped a living statue distract a group of children so he could go to the bathroom without traumatising them. Or the time they got into a fistfight with a bear in the middle of a prison break. Incredibly, those aren't even close to the two most ridiculous examples.

Yakuza is the story of Kazuma Kiryu, a man who excels in fist fights, but who also has a strong moral core which will have you constantly wondering why he signed up to be a yakuza in the first place. It's also the story of Kamurocho, a fictional district of Tokyo that captures the magic of Japan's nightlife better than any other game. It's a 3D brawler at heart, wherein you walk the streets beating up punks and slapping them around with park benches, before checking in to see how your chicken's investment portfolio is getting on. But given the serious subject matter, was there any nervousness within the development team about

» [PlayStation 2] Kiryu's relationship with this girl, Haruka, is the beating heart of the series.



» [PlayStation 2] Kiryu can visit all sorts of locations in Kamurocho, including adult stores.

» [PlayStation 2] Kiryu can be smooth with the ladies, so long as you don't pick this option.

» [PlayStation 2] Majima only has a small role in the first *Yakuza*, but swiftly became a fan favourite.

how the real-life yakuza would react to the game?

"In Japan, works dealing with yakuza society, known as 'ninkyō' works, have existed as a universal genre," explains new studio director Masayoshi Yokoyama. "So the existence of entertainment works with the same theme was not particularly surprising. Within Japan the topic that stirred up more excitement was actually something along the lines of, 'I heard there's a cabaret club game in it.'" A cabaret club that, if you visit more than once, punishes you by the dancer revealing herself to be a disguised hitman (the fact she was dancing with an AK-47 should have been a clue).

"At the time, the catchphrase of the game was, 'Can't games go further?'" says Yokoyama. "But the meaning behind that was less about pushing boundaries for shock value and more about whether we could create games for adults rather than toy-like games aimed at children."

> "WE INITIALLY PRODUCED THE ENGLISH DUB IN A STUDIO IN JAPAN"
> **MASAYOSHI YOKOYAMA**

Kazuma Kiryu is the original *Yakuza*'s greatest achievement. It'd be easy to dismiss this leading man as gaming's latest brainless thug, especially if you've just been on the business end of one of his trademark bicycles-to-the-face. But within the first hour he shows how upstanding he truly is by taking the fall for a murder to save his best friend. Kiryu spends ten years in prison, and when he's finally released in 2005, he finds that almost every yakuza is out to kill him.

It's still worth playing, but if you've enjoyed any of the later games and pick up a Western copy of *Yakuza* for PlayStation 2, you'll be in for an audible shock. The Japanese voice track isn't included, instead replaced with Western actors and a revised script that's so sweary it would make Joe Pesci blush. "At the time, I remember that our Japanese development team had a rather low awareness of quality when it came to localisation, especially English dubbing," recalls chief producer Hiroyuki Sakamoto. "Because of that, we initially produced the English dub in a studio in Japan using voice actors who lived in Japan. However, the Sega Of America team harshly criticised it."

So the developers reworked the schedule and redid the dub in the United States. "As a result, we were able to have talented actors from around the world perform the drama, and we recognised that the quality improved significantly," says Sakamoto. It's an impressive cast, including Mark Hamill, and an excellent Michael Madsen as a *Yakuza* boss who's fond of cutting off fingers (no surprise Mr Blonde was right for that character).

Despite Kiryu spending the game in constant danger, you can still go hit some home runs ▶

■ Masayoshi Yokoyama is the Ryu Ga Gotoku studio director and executive producer, having started out as a writer on the first *Yakuza*.

■ Hiroyuki Sakamoto is the *Like A Dragon* and *Yakuza* series chief producer, and has worked on the series since the beginning.

■ Ryosuke Horii is the producer/director of *Yakuza Kiwami 3* and *Dark Ties*, and has worked on the series since *Yakuza 2*.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
THE REMAKES
FOUR YAKUZA GAMES HAVE GOTTEN THE FULL REMAKE TREATMENT

YAKUZA KIWAMI

"The technological gap between the PS2 and PS3 was significant," explains Ryosuke Horii, of the decision to remake the original. *Kiwami* ditches the fixed camera angles, constant loading, and overwhelming amount of random battles for a slicker experience. Plus, we finally got the Japanese audio.

YAKUZA KIWAMI 2

"We couldn't use the data from the original version," says Hiroyuki Sakamoto "so we had to recreate all of the data for *Yakuza 2* from scratch for the Dragon Engine, which required a lot of work." It was worth it for another stellar remake.

LIKE A DRAGON: ISHIN

Originally a Japan-only PS3 release, this sublime slice of historical fiction takes us to 1853 and uses *Yakuza*'s great cast of characters to tell the story of a Kiryu-flavoured spin on legendary samurai Sakamoto Ryōma. Don't expect *Sekiro*, but the swordplay focus is novel nonetheless.

YAKUZA KIWAMI 3 & DARK TIES

Kiwami 3 expands things by adding a spin-off prequel. While it adds lots of late-*Yakuza* nonsense, like biker gang minigames and a borderline-magic mobile phone, it does lose some of the original game's charm in its desperation to constantly entertain.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

SPIN-OFFS 2008-2012

HANDHELDS, HISTORICALS AND HOARDS OF ZOMBIES

RYU GA GOTOKU KENZAN!

Like A Dragon Arrives! – 2008

Set in 1606, this is a, er, 'loose' retelling of the life of legendary swordsman Miyamoto Musashi, who looks suspiciously like a certain Kazuma Kiryu. Sadly, this PS3 game never got an official translation or Western release, and it'll change in the future. Bah!

KUROHYŌ: RYU GA GOTOKU SHINSHŌ

Black Panther: Like A Dragon New Chapter – 2010

This outstanding PSP spin-off featured a new protagonist, beautiful animated cutscenes, and arguably the best fighting system of the entire series. Sadly also never released in the West, this being before *Yakuza Zero* helped the series break through here, but there's an excellent English fan translation online.

YAKUZA: DEAD SOULS

2011

This non-canon spin-off sees zombies invading Kamurocho. The bizarre shooting controls make it a bit of a chore to play, but a typically hilarious script makes it worth digging out the PS3 for. You've got to admire the restaurants that don't close even during a zombie outbreak.

KUROHYŌ 2: RYU GA GOTOKU ASHURA HEN

Black Panther 2: Like A Dragon Ashura Chapter – 2012

Japan gets to enjoy a sequel to the brilliant PSP game, while we in the West bitterly replay *Daxter* instead and weep about how unfair it all is. Luckily, this also got a stellar fan translation too. But how about an officially translated remaster?

» [PlayStation 2] Kiryu takes a break from the critical path for a spot of golf. Fore!

» [PlayStation 2] This fierce detective, and her relationship with Kiryu, is a highlight of *Yakuza 2*

at the batting cage, or relax at a blackjack table. "We kept adding various gameplay elements, and the volume of the game grew day by day, so among the development staff we would jokingly say, 'It's starting to feel like *Shenmue*.'" says Sakamoto. "Since the game was set in a nightlife district, we felt that players should be able to enjoy all kinds of activities, and we continued developing without placing strict limits on ourselves." And while it's nowhere near as activity-packed as the recent *Yakuza Kiwami 3*, the original's Kamurocho is still impressively dense with fun distractions.

> "SINCE THE GAME WAS SET IN A NIGHTLIFE DISTRICT, WE FELT THAT PLAYERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ENJOY ALL KINDS OF ACTIVITIES"
> HIROYUKI SAKAMOTO

***Yakuza 2* expands on the original in every way.** Another location to explore, more minigames and more outrageous ways to beat people up (this is where Kiryu starts developing a love for smacking people with comfy chairs). Astonishingly, it came out just one year later. "The point we prioritised most was the early development of a sequel," says Sakamoto. "The first game had gained a strong following in Japan as a very unique title, so we believed that releasing a sequel without losing that momentum would help establish it as a series."

Yakuza 3 saw the series take its first generation leap from the PlayStation 2 to the PlayStation 3. Fixed camera angles were out, seamless third-person exploration was finally in. The biggest change, however, was the setting. Kiryu is happily running an orphanage with his adopted daughter, Haruka, in a small seaside town. "We chose Okinawa – a peaceful setting rather than an urban one –because we wanted to portray a man freed from the ties of the underworld enjoying a brief moment of tranquillity," explains Sakamoto. "Since the story begins with a warm, family like development very different from what came before, this title also broadened the dramatic range of the series." *Yakuza 3*'s opening stretch, where you're constantly embarking on fetch quests for the orphanage's children, is divisive to say the least. But the children are adorable and often hilarious, and prove that Kiryu might be the greatest gaming dad of them all. Besides, it's not long before Kiryu gets wrapped up in another crime thriller.

» [PlayStation 2] You first meet *Yakuza 2*'s Ryuji Goda smashing a bottle into an underling's face, and that's one of his calmer appearances.

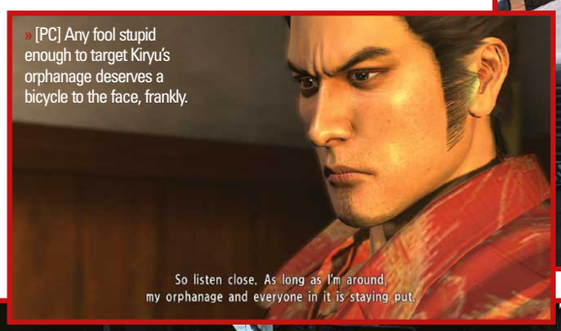
Yakuza 4 increased the scope of the series even further, featuring four protagonists: Shun Akiyama, the world's nicest loan shark who doesn't even charge interest; Taiga Saejima, a man so tough he wins a fight against a bear in *Yakuza 5*; Masayoshi Tanimura, who has the unfortunate nickname of the Parasite Of Kamurocho; and, of course, a returning Kazuma Kiryu.

"Up through *3*, Kiryu was the sole protagonist, and we told the story by changing the setting each time," says Sakamoto. "For *4*, we wanted to try a different kind of development. So we deliberately chose to stay in a single setting – Kamurocho – and deepen multiple protagonists, aiming to create a new kind of dramatic progression."

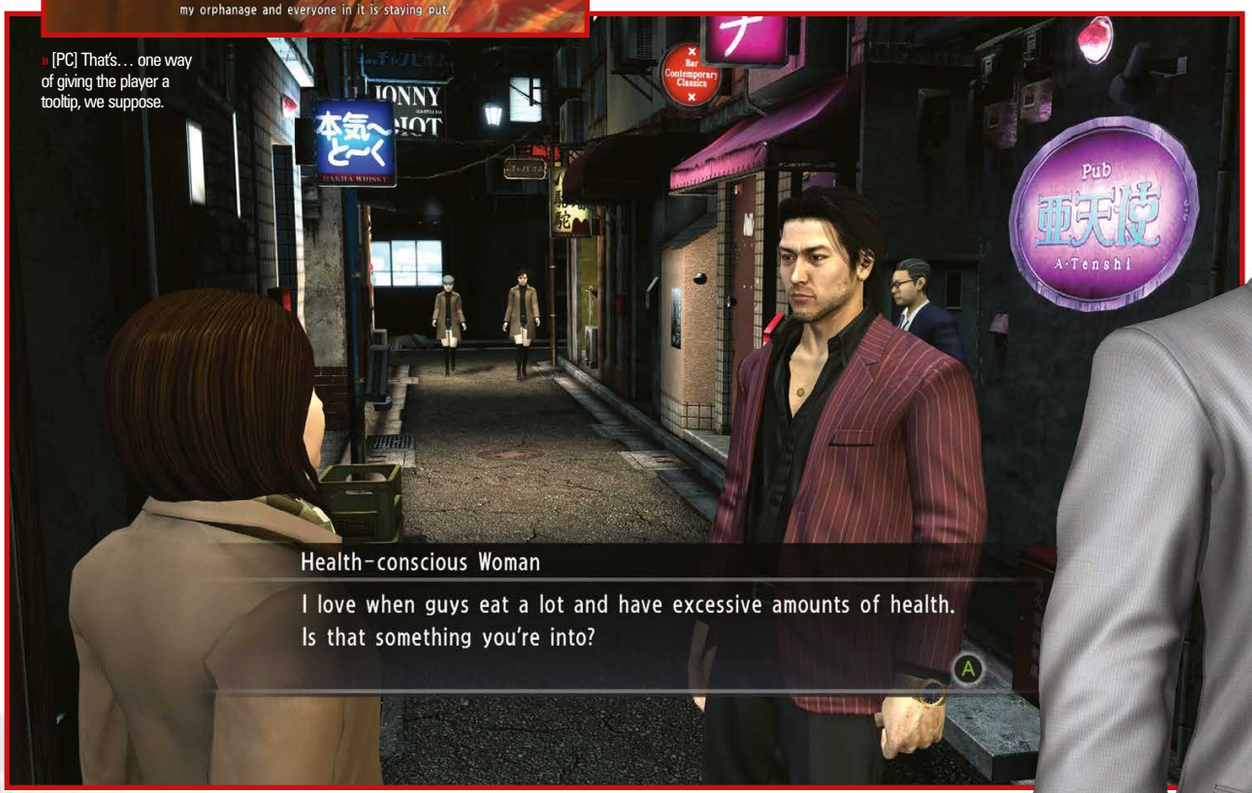
Yakuza 5, astonishingly, was even more ambitious. It has five playable characters and tons of new locations. It's a game where you break out of prison in one level and then have to try and make it as a teen idol in another. "As the culmination of all the challenges we had taken on up to that point, we set out to depict a long drama with multiple protagonists across Japan's five major entertainment districts," says Sakamoto. "At the time, we had the largest team in our history, and we continued development with the mindset of doing absolutely everything we could." And that included putting some beloved retro games in Kamurocho's arcades. "We ended up thinking, 'Why not port some classic Sega titles?'" says Sakamoto. "*Virtual Fighter 2*

» [PC] The quietness of Okinawa is a world away from the bustling streets and constant drama of Kamurocho

» [PC] Haruka grows up a lot during the events of *Yakuza 3*, a maturing we don't often see in games.



» [PC] Any fool stupid enough to target Kiryu's orphanage deserves a bicycle to the face, frankly.



» [PC] That's… one way of giving the player a tooltip, we suppose.

» [PC] Saejima, one of *Yakuza 4*'s toughest characters, gets a ferocious introduction.

» [PC] Shun Akiyama, the loan shark introduced in *Yakuza 4*, might be the coolest character in all of *Yakuza*.

» [PC] Kiryu gets into a typically flamboyant fight at the start of *Yakuza 5*. And he's meant to be undercover here…

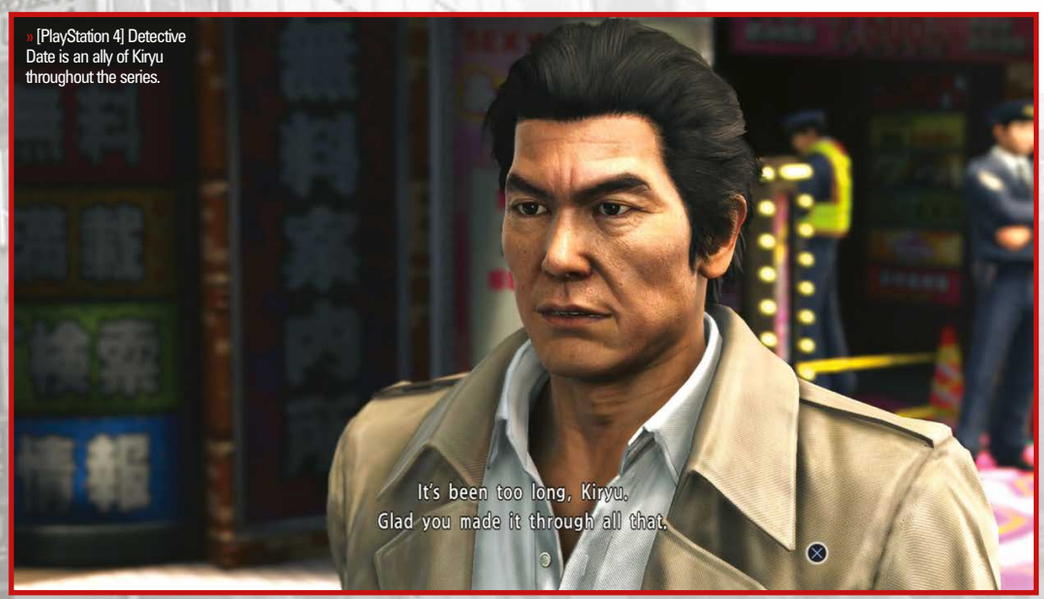
» [PC] Haruka is finally a playable character in *Yakuza 5*, trying to make it as an idol.

» [PlayStation 4] The kids of Kamurocho can be so cruel.

» [PlayStation 4] Based on *Yakuza Zero*, the Eighties in Kamurocho were wild. An updated *Director's Cut* was released in 2025.

» [PlayStation 4] A love of food is a staple of the series. *Yakuza 6* even shows how it hits your stomach.

» [PC] *Yakuza 6* saw the team upgrading to a new engine and concluding Kiryu's story.



» [PlayStation 4] Detective Date is an ally of Kiryu throughout the series.

» [PlayStation 4] You'd think thugs would have learned to stop attacking Kiryu by *Yakuza 6*.

– one of Sega's flagship arcade games – seemed like the obvious choice." Delightfully, a new selection of retro hits has been featured in almost every *Yakuza* since.

Next came *Yakuza 0*, an Eighties-set prequel. "We felt at the time that the numbered entries we had created so far had reached a natural stopping point," says Sakamoto. "One of the ideas that came up was a prequel set as *Episode 0*. By depicting the entertainment districts of the most flamboyant years of the bubble era, we aimed to heighten the purity of the underworld and the flamboyant, exaggerated world surrounding it." And what better way to show that flamboyance than having Kiryu literally punch money out of people?

"WHEN REMAKING THE GAME, WE FELT IT WOULD ACTUALLY BE UNNATURAL NOT TO PORTRAY MORE OF MAJIMA"
RYOSUKE HORII

***Yakuza 0* also finally let us play as series favourite Goro 'Mad Dog' Majima.** "We held our first character popularity poll, and that was when we discovered just how popular Majima was," says Sakamoto.

"Until then, his appearances in the numbered titles had been limited, but every time he showed up, his outrageous, incomprehensible behaviour captivated many players. I believe we were confident that if we delved deeper into his past, the number of Majima fans would only grow further."

Yakuza 6 returned to Kiryu once again being the sole protagonist. It was also intended to be the final game with him as the lead. "Because the *Yakuza* series depicts realistic contemporary drama, the characters age just as we do," says Sakamoto, and Kiryu was no exception. "The ending of *6* marked a major turning point in his life and served as a natural conclusion for his story up to that point." Kiryu this time visits a small town so sedate, it makes Okinawa look like New York. But naturally melodrama soon comes calling, and it ends on a bittersweet note that serves as a great send-off for the Dragon Of Dojima. The team then decided to go all the way back and remake the original with *Yakuza Kiwami*. "The two PS2 titles had many rough, unrefined aspects in terms of game design and technology," explains *Yakuza* veteran Ryosuke Horii. "Because the *Yakuza* series' story is continuous and an important element, new players naturally tend to start with '1'. We were concerned that if '1' felt outdated as a game – such as having long load times or inconvenient save systems – those newcomers might have trouble getting into the series smoothly. Therefore, we felt it was only natural to recreate *Yakuza 1* in a way that preserved the strength of the original story while making it 'easy to play' using modern technology and know-how."

Kiwami's biggest change from the original is the Majima Everywhere system, where Majima keeps popping up to fight you, often in an absurd disguise (including an idol and a zombie). "In the original *Yakuza 1*, Majima made a strong impression, but he actually didn't appear in that many scenes," says Horii. "Part of the reason for including him more was because of his popularity, but by then he had grown into an increasingly important character in the main stories of the later titles. So when remaking the game, we felt it would actually be unnatural not to portray more of Majima. The idea for Majima Everywhere came from that line of thinking. By placing Majima close to the player as a 'tough foe' and a 'rival' we were able to draw out a good sense of tension as well as humour."

After also giving *Yakuza 2* the remake treatment, the team got to work on *Yakuza 7*, which was the series' biggest gamble yet. It not only featured a brand-new protagonist, Ichiban Kasuga, but also threw out the acclaimed street-brawling and replaced it with a new turn-based combat system, reminiscent of the *Dragon Quest* RPGs Ichiban is obsessed with.

"We had already decided to replace Kiryu as the protagonist, but if we created a new hero using the same battle system as Kiryu, there was a strong concern that he would end up ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: SPIN-OFFS 2012-2018

SHOOTING, SNOOPING AND SAMURAI ACTION

BINARY DOMAIN

2012
While not technically a *Yakuza* game, this excellent shooter from *Yakuza* creator Toshihiro Nagoshi is full of his trademark whacky characters – including a yakuza boss – and is too good not to mention here. The Xbox 360 version runs beautifully on a Series X, too.

RYŪ GA GOTOKU ISHIN!

Like A Dragon: Ishin! – 2014
A launch title for the PlayStation 4 in Japan, whereas here in the West we'd have to wait nine years for the remake of this samurai epic. At least it was worth the wait. It still has its merits, but the remake is definitely the one to go for, especially if you don't speak Japanese. Er, obviously.

FIST OF THE NORTH STAR: LOST PARADISE

2018
This excellent manga adaptation is like if *Yakuza*'s combat was somehow even more violent and ridiculous. Imagine if Kiryu took a few training sessions with *Bayonetta*, and learned moves like 'hundred fist rush' which is exactly what it sounds like. Snap it up on PS4.

RYŪ GA GOTOKU ONLINE

Yakuza Online – 2018
We'd gladly sacrifice our pinky fingers for a proper *Yakuza* MMO. Sadly, that's not what this is. Instead, it's a free-to-play card game for Android, iOS, and PC that never left Japan. Typically excellent presentation, mind, that retains an impressive amount of the main series charm.

JUDGMENT

2018
This time you're a private detective, Takayuki Yagami, who left his profession as a lawyer in disgrace for reasons that shan't be spoiled here. Expect the usual street-fighting fun but with an enjoyable focus on more law-abiding types. Delightfully, *Phoenix Wright* even gets name checked.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

SPIN-OFFS 2020-2025

STREET BRAWLING, SCHOOL-SLEUTHING AND SAILING ON THE HIGH SEAS

STREETS OF KAMUROCHO

2020

Sega celebrated its 60th anniversary with this crossover between *Yakuza* and *Streets Of Rage 2*. It's short – literally only one level long – but a fun little freebie that sadly is no longer available. Can we have another for the 70th birthday, Sega?

LOST JUDGMENT

2021

This superior sequel sees you investigating a high school to try and track down 'The Napoleon Of Crime'. The highlight is an eerily calm schoolteacher who endures constant mean pranks, but finally cracks when the students urinate on his beloved flowers. Delightfully absurd as ever.

LIKE A DRAGON: THE MAN WHO ERASED HIS NAME

2023

Slight but fun mini-*Yakuza*, in which the Dragon Of Dojima 'disguises' himself Clark Kent-style with a pair of glasses. Kiryu also gets some brilliant spy gadgets in this one. You haven't lived until you've knocked over a group of punks with your rocket shoes.

LIKE A DRAGON: PIRATE YAKUZA IN HAWAII

2025

Majima wakes up in Hawaii with amnesia and decides he might as well become a pirate. The actual piracy disappoints – more bland flag than *Black Flag* – but it's still a hilarious high-seas adventure. The song and dance number will leave you grinning for weeks.

» [PC] The Sega arcades are a real treat for retro game fans (we're going to boldly assume you are one?).

» [PC] *Yakuza 7* both parodies the genre's tropes and manages to be a great RPG.

feeling like a second-rate or watered-down version of Kiryu," explains Horii. "We had also decided that the new protagonist, Kasuga, would be Kiryu's complete opposite – a man with no legend to his name, starting from rock bottom. To portray a character like him, we felt the RPG genre was the best fit: a hero who starts out weak and gradually grows stronger by gathering companions. So we made the bold decision to shift directions. We simply asked ourselves, 'What is the best way to express the story of Ichiban Kasuga as a gameplay experience?' and the answer we arrived at was an RPG."

> "WE SIMPLY ASKED OURSELVES, 'WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO EXPRESS THE STORY OF ICHIBAN KASUGA AS A GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCE?' AND THE ANSWER WE ARRIVED AT WAS AN RPG"
>
> RYOSUKE HORII

The gamble worked out as *Yakuza: Like A Dragon* – the game's title is even a cute nod to *Dragon Quest* – was another great entry point to the series. Not bad for a game with a very different leading man. "Kiryu is the kind of person who shoulders everything alone and fights by himself for the sake of those around him, which is why he came to be known as a 'legendary yakuza'," explains Horii. "In contrast, we wanted to portray Kasuga as Kiryu's opposite: someone who doesn't try to solve everything on his own, but instead draws others in and involves the people around him. We believe that both Kiryu, who fights alone, and Kasuga, who can rely on others for help, are strong in their own ways."

Kiryu is so strong, in fact, that retirement was never going to stick. Three years later he once again took the lead for a shorter standalone game, *Like A Dragon Gaiden: The Man Who Erased His Name*. "The longer a main story is, the longer the development cycle becomes, which makes it difficult to casually try new ideas," says Horii. "The fact that a game with a shorter main story can still be well-received as long as it is well-crafted greatly expands the range of ideas and possibilities available to us."

Like A Dragon: Infinite Wealth sees Ichiban and Kiryu as protagonists, and for the first time the series left Japan for the golden shores of Hawaii. There's even a delightful mechanic where you can say 'aloha!' to strangers to make friends with them. "The overseas setting in this title is simply the result of the story we wanted to tell and the characters we wanted to portray," says Horii, of taking Ichiban overseas. "We want to remain consistent with this stance going forward. We don't make decisions like, 'Let's set it in this city because it will probably sell well or become popular.'"

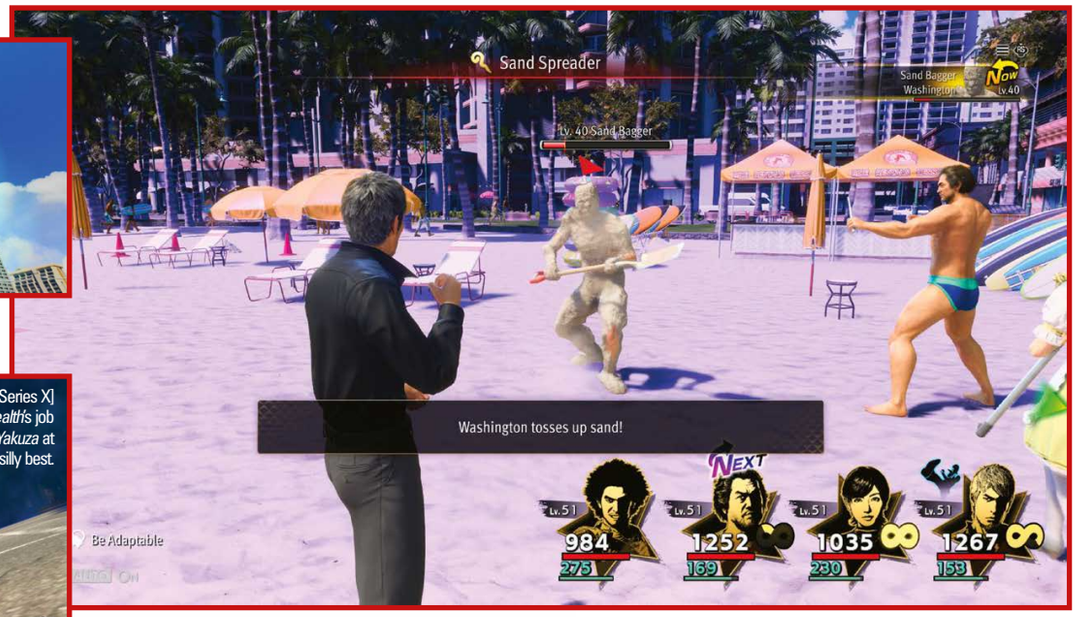
Don't worry, *Yakuza* didn't suddenly get sensible now it was treading in American waters. This is still a game where Ichiban at one point walks completely naked across the beach, with his naughtier bits thankfully hidden by pool floats and sandcastles. There's even a VTuber in the cast this time. "Because we strive to depict realistic contemporary drama, we believe it would actually feel unnatural not to touch on social trends," says Horii. "So having VTuber culture appear in the work is a very natural fit. However, game development takes several years, and something that's popular when we begin production won't necessarily still be popular by the time the game is finished. Since the scenario is created at the very start of a project, we have to predict and anticipate how that element will look several years down the line before deciding whether to include it. That's the difficult part where our instincts and perspective are really tested."

Speaking of difficulty, the team's next game, *Stranger Than Heaven*, makes *Yakuza 5* look about as complex as *Pong*. It'll have five leading men and be set in five different cities across five different time periods. Ridiculously overambitious? Definitely, but if any studio has proved they can pull it off, time and again, it's this one. Long may they continue. ✱

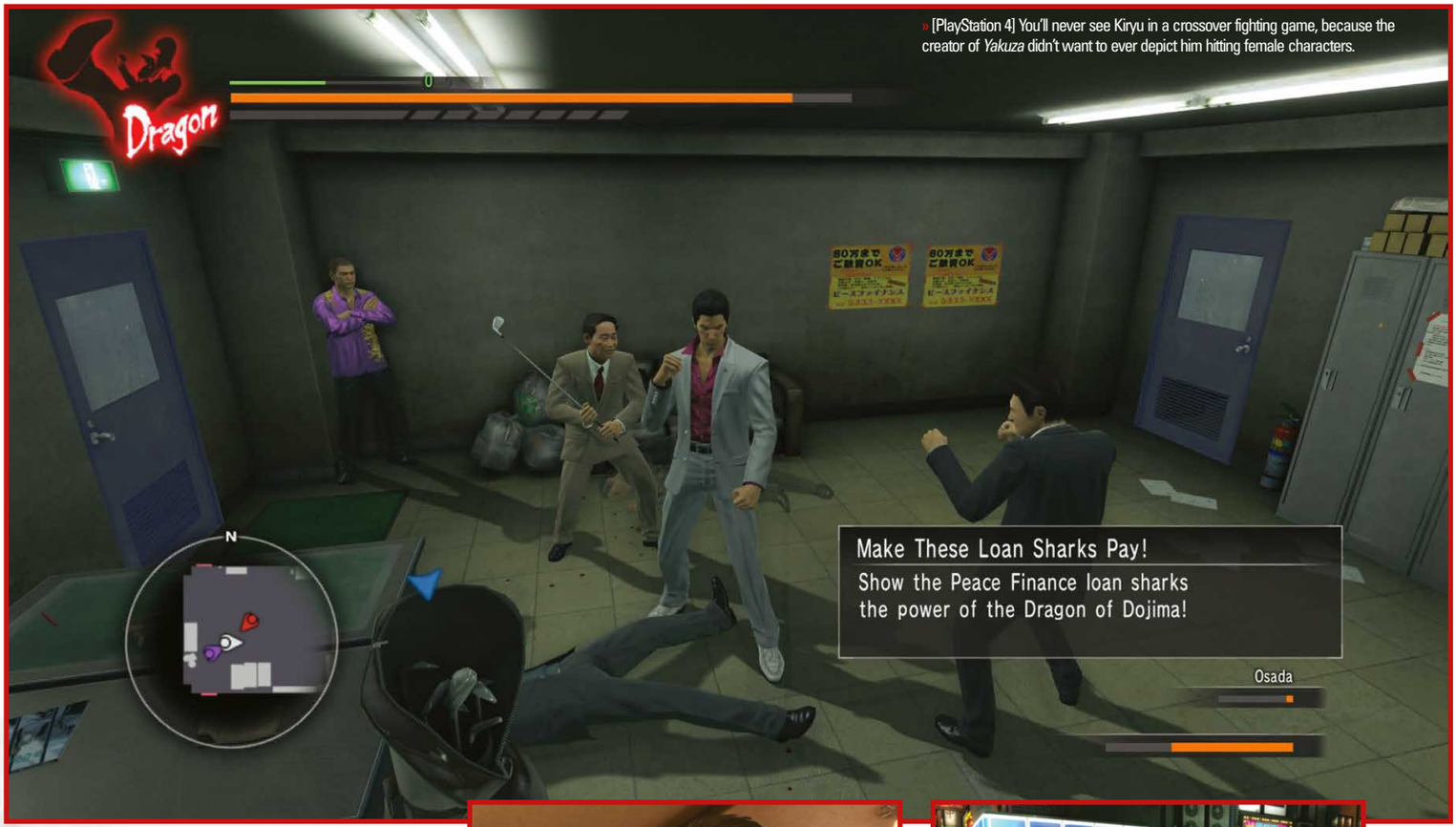
» [PC] Ichiban Kasuga, *Yakuza 7*s new hero, may look intimidating, but he's an even bigger softy than Kiryu.

» [Xbox Series X] What better way for Ichiban to explore Hawaii's waters?

» [Xbox Series X] *Infinite Wealth*'s job system is *Yakuza* at its silly best.



» [Xbox Series X] Just another day at the beach for the heroes of *Infinite Wealth* (also known as *Yakuza 8*).



» [PlayStation 4] You'll never see Kiryu in a crossover fighting game, because the creator of *Yakuza* didn't want to ever depict him hitting female characters.

» [PlayStation 4] *Kiwami* is a great way to enjoy *Yakuza 1*, especially if you only played the Western PS2 release.

» [PlayStation 4] Don't worry, you can still be a total jerk in *Yakuza Kiwami*.

Manhunt

SHANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

RETROREVIVAL

» PLAYSTATION 2 » 2003 » ROCKSTAR NORTH

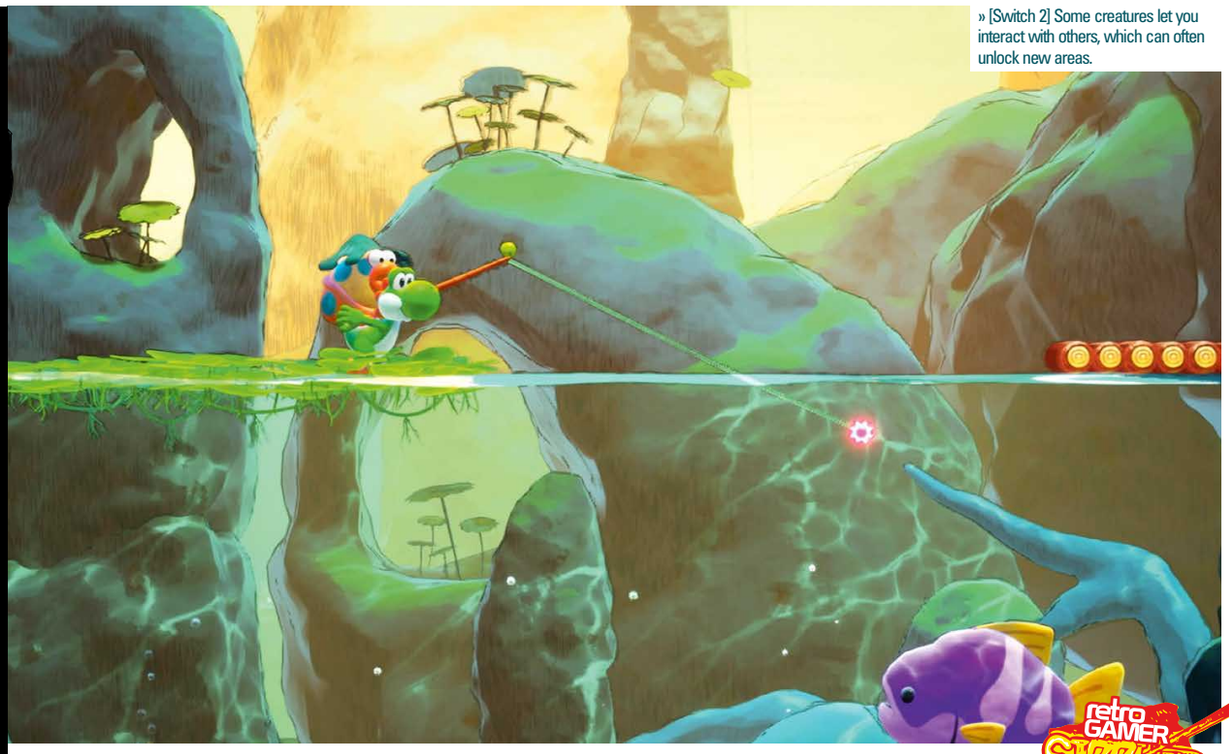
Believe it or not, there was a time when Rockstar North did more than make *Grand Theft Auto* games. In November 2003, a year after it released *GTA: Vice City*, and a year before *GTA: San Andreas*, it put out *Manhunt*, a new game without a carjacking or convenience store stick-up in sight. The studio was already revered thanks to the *GTA* games, so its next PlayStation 2 game was eagerly awaited – especially as it was hyped as being darker and more disturbing than anything it had done to date.

Rockstar North wasn't wrong! I encountered the game in the worst possible way, having to write a full walkthrough for it. This typically involved sitting in a darkened room and playing the game right through to the end, with barely any breaks. So I settled down and stepped into the shoes of James Earl Cash, a convict who's freed from death row and dropped into a *Most Dangerous Game* scenario where he's forced to hunt and kill other criminals on camera – to satisfy a warped director's demands. If you picture that scene from *A Clockwork Orange* where Malcolm McDowell has his eyes forced open and is subjected to hours of on-screen violence… that was me, kind of. You could say *Manhunt* made an impression.

Playing it again all these years later, its power to shock has diminished. This is partly due to the PS2-era visuals, but mainly because the levels of violence in other games now routinely match it. It still packs a gut punch at times, especially when it comes to carrying out executions – at which point the kill cam adopts a grainy videotape quality as you get to work with your makeshift weapons. But what the passing of time reveals is that behind all the grubby stuff lies a really solid and suspenseful stealth game, where you spend far more time hiding in the dark, silently watching your prey and listening to them chew the fat, than you do killing them. Add in the sinister director-in-your-ear, voiced with sinister calmness by Brian Cox (not the space guy), and you have a game that's worth a second, less voyeuristic look. ✱

RETRORATED

>> This month we play Good-Feel's latest Yoshi game, tackle a dungeon delver, play the latest Evercade cartridges, read up on the Fatal Fury series and play the latest Bubsy release



» [Switch 2] Some creatures let you interact with others, which can often unlock new areas.

retro GAMER SWITCH

Yoshi And The Mysterious Book

HOW DOES YOSHI'S LATEST CHAPTER UNDER GOOD-FEEL FARE?

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** SWITCH 2
- **ALSO ON:** NA
- **PRICE:** £58.99
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** GOOD-FEEL
- **PLAYERS:** 1

The latest platformer from Good-Feel is a curious beast, much like the many creatures it asks you to investigate. You think you have the game all figured out, but then the credits run and it turns out that there's much more to *Yoshi And The Mysterious Book* than first meets the eye. The game's story is as simple as it is charming, telling the tale of a mysterious book that crash-lands onto Yoshi's island home after it's discovered by Bowser Jr.

Going by the name Mr E, the magical tome enlists Yoshi to investigate its pages to uncover knowledge about the many odd-looking creatures that dwell in each chapter.

As Yoshi interacts with the highly stylised game world he'll be able to utilise the abilities of certain creatures and trigger written and drawn references that will be added to the creature's book entry and award him with stars – the more stars Yoshi earns the more chapters he can unlock. Once a critter is discovered Mr E will give it a suitable name, or allow you to choose one (and no, hilarious swear words sadly aren't allowed).

The ability to study and interact with *Mysterious Book*'s many inhabitants works wonderfully as a concept, as it not only gives the

» [Switch 2] There's a set number of flowers to find on each stage and many are very well hidden.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Yoshi made his first appearance in *Super Mario World* as Mario's loyal mount. He soon started appearing not only in later *Mario* sequels, but also his own stand-alone platform and spin-off games, including *Yoshi's Cookie, Yoshi's Safari* and *Yoshi's Story. Mysterious Book* is the third *Yoshi* game by Good-Feel.

★PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

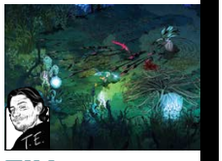
Vampire Crawlers

If your new game is a Roguelike and it features card-based deck building, there's a good chance I'll play it.

MARTYN

Pragmata

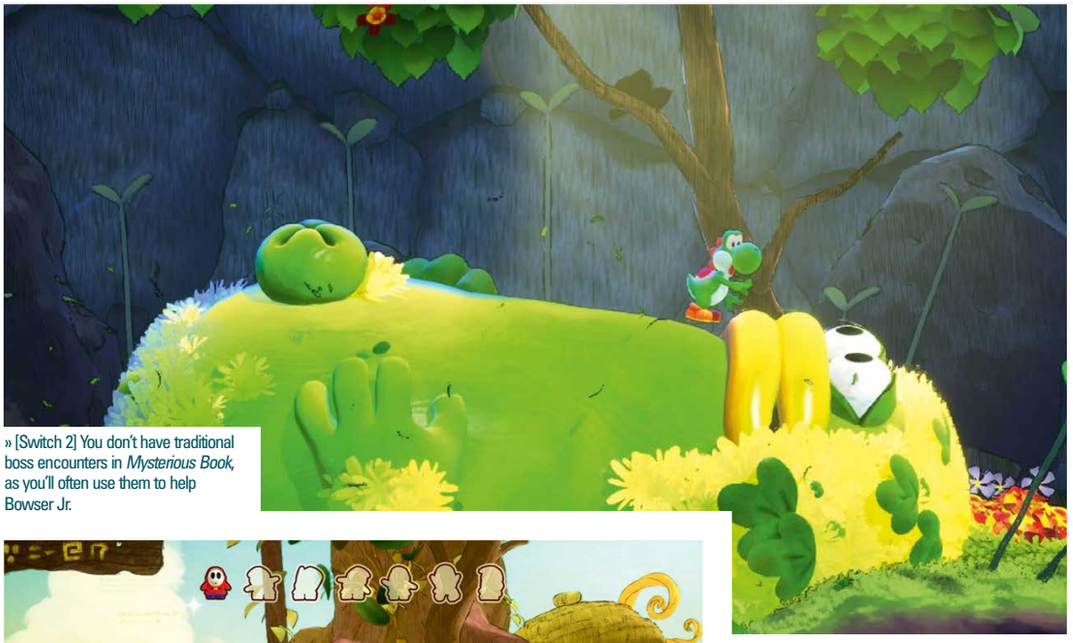
I've just started playing on the PS5 and I can already see why people are saying this could be the start of a new series.



TIM

Hades II

I've now put God Mode on. It was just taking far too long and getting very repetitive trying to beat the Overworld.



» [Switch 2] You don't have traditional boss encounters in *Mysterious Book*, as you'll often use them to help Bowser Jr.

» [Switch 2] Each creature always has a specific goal to unlock. Here you have to find all his missing friends.

game world a more lived-in feel but encourages exploration as you try and work out how each beastie can be manipulated.

Some creatures can be jumped on to reach otherwise inaccessible areas, some can be turned into weapons, or used to capture others, while some can even destroy the environment, opening up new areas for Yoshi to explore. It's a neat concept and you're always eager to move to each new chapter in order to see what new abilities there are to discover. As the game progresses living ink blots appear within Mr E's pages and some creatures will require further investigation, ensuring there's always something to do.

In many other aspects *Mysterious Book* is very similar to Good-Feel's earlier *Yoshi* games. Yoshi can eat fruit, gobble up enemies and turn (most of) them into eggs, and collect flowers, which in this game, lets you unlock useful tools to help your exploration go easier. There are plenty of coins that Yoshi can grab on his journey as well, which can be used to get hints on any undiscovered abilities a creature may still have. All his usual moves are present and correct and it's fun seeing how they can be used.

Oddly though, while the game's premise is extremely interesting, with a lovely sense of discovery, the core platforming at the game's heart just feels rather lacking. Some levels feel extremely inventive as you try and work out how to trigger their end or escape a marauding enemy, while others feel like they're over in a matter of moments. Yes it's a game that's clearly aimed at the younger end of the market, but it feels pedestrian in a way that the *Mario* games never do. *Mysterious Book* hints at something genuinely different, but it never really lives up to those grand promises.

That's a real shame, as there's still plenty to like here. The game's boss fights are highly inventive, often requiring you to help Bowser Jr out of whatever predicament he's currently found himself in, while it's quite compelling trying to fill in all the ecology entries for each creature, effectively turning Yoshi into a reptilian David Attenborough. As we mentioned before the game offers plenty of reasons to continue playing once the credits roll, but it's a pity that it can sometimes feel like a chore to get there. *Mysterious Book* is arguably the best *Yoshi* game that Good-Feel has put out since it took over the series in 2015, but it sadly lacks the sheer creativity of the newer *Mario* games or the imagination of *Donkey Kong Bananza*. There's certainly plenty to enjoy here, but if you're looking for a Switch 2 exclusive to show off your shiny new console, this isn't it. ✱

» [Switch 2] *Mysterious Book*'s presentation is superb with Mr E's innards being filled with lovely illustrations.

» [Switch 2] Those bubbles can be used to reach higher areas. Careful, they don't last too long.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
YOSHI'S STORY (NINTENDO 64)

▼ SOMETHING NEW
YOSHI'S CRAFTED WORLD (SWITCH)

In a nutshell

There are plenty of nice ideas to be found within Good-Feel's game, but the creativity it does offer feels strangely restricted, making it feel rather conventional as a result.

>> Score **71%**

» [Switch 2] There are simple puzzle-like elements in the game, like hitting these notes in the correct order.

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

Evercade Multi-Game Cartridges

A DOUBLE DOSE OF FUN FROM BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT:** EVERCADE FAMILY
- **ALSO ON:** SUPER POCKET FAMILY
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £19.99 EACH
- **PUBLISHER:** BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

The latest Evercade cartridges have arrived and we'd imagine that most fans of the console line will be hastily adding them to their collections. First up is *Activision Collection 2* and while the boxart's blurb of "15 more Activision legends!" is pushing it a bit, there's no denying it features a great collection of games. The highlights for us are the exploration classic *HERO*, *David Crane's Pitfall II: Lost Caverns*, *Dragster* and *Stampede*, and a selection of great shooters, including Steve Cartwright's *Plaque Attack* and *Seaquest*, *River Raid II*, *Cosmic Commuter* and *Spider Fight*. That leaves *Oink!*, *Skiing*, *Robot Tank*, *Boxing* and *Checkers*. They range from OK (*Oink!*) to terrible (*Checkers*) and while you're unlikely to return to any of them for any length of time, it's nice to have them included.

Our second cart is *Mega Cat Studios Collection 3* and it's another lovely selection of curated games from the popular homebrew publisher. We won't spend too much time on *Gumball In Trick-Or-Treat Land* as it was reviewed in last month's Homebrew section, but it's a great RPG with nods to *Undertale*. *Flap Happy* is a physics-based platformer that sees you trying to activate ledges to proceed to the next stage, while *The Meating* has you charging through levels as a lonely Minotaur on the look out for keys. *GunTneR* is a fairly forgettable shooter that only lingers because it scrolls right to left and features some nice music,

» [Evercade] It's very polished and has some nice music, but we just couldn't get on with *GunTneR*.

» [Evercade] *HERO* is easily one of the best games to be found on *Activision Collection 2*.

while *Super Fanger* is a decent action game that only really comes alive when played with a second player. *Gravibots* is a slick puzzler where you use gravity to thwart your foes, while the puzzling continues with the fun *Plyuk* that requires you to clone yourself to reach out-of-the-way keys so you can unlock the level's exit.

Machine Cave is a fairly ambitious take on *Gravitar* but we found its controls and bouncing ship far too frustrating to enjoy, while *Rocket Panda* is a charming little action game that sees you jetting around the world of Biscuit Land and rescuing its inhabitants. That leaves *Kudzu*, an exceptional clone of the early *Legend Of Zelda* games, with a gardening theme and gorgeous pixel graphics.

If you can only buy one of these cartridges, we'd opt for *Mega Cat Studios Collection 3*, as not only is the general quality of the games better, but there is much more variety on offer too, from platformers and shooters, to puzzlers and RPGs. *Activision Collection 2* certainly isn't shabby though, thanks to the quality of the emulation and the fact that so many of the

>> Score 75%

» [Evercade] *Kudzu* is a great *Zelda* clone that will appeal to anyone that enjoyed Link's Game Boy adventures.

included games still hold up very well today. We've only been able to test this month's cartridges on a standard Evercade XP and VS model, but we didn't experience any issues on either of them. Both cartridges include the usual colour manuals and they also come with extra stickers as well. We feel the collections are exceptionally well priced for what they offer and are bound to keep you busy until the next two releases roll around.

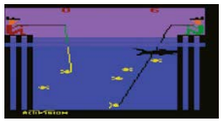
In A Nutshell

***Activision Collection 2* has some bangers, but *Mega Cat Studios Collection 3* has more value for money.**

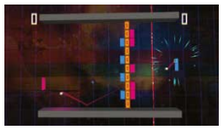
>> Score 86%

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
ACTIVISION HITS REMIXED (PSP)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
ATARI 50: THE ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION (PC)



✱ BRIEF HISTORY

» The original Evercade launched in 2020, alongside ten cartridges. Since then, several new pieces of hardware have been added to the Evercade family, including the VS, Alpha and the Super Pocket range by sister studio Hyper Mega Tech!, and there are now over 70 cartridges available.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Evercade Multi-Game Cartridges

» *Flap Happy*, *GunTneR*, *Kudzu*, *The Meating* and *Rocket Panda* all started off as successful Kickstarter campaigns.

» Each collection comes with a colour manual, 26 pages for *Mega Cat Studios Collection 3* and 34 for *Activision Collection 2*.

YOUR GAME IS NOT OVER

CONTINUE?

[Y]/[Y]

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★ PICK OF THE MONTH

Vampire Crawlers: The Turbo Wildcard From Vampire Survivors

» **System:** PC (tested), PS5, Switch, Switch 2, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £8.99+ » **Buy it from:** Online

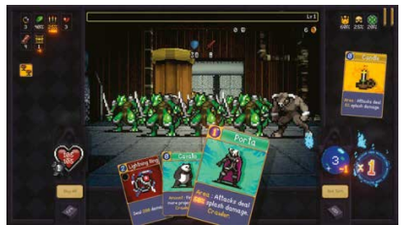
If you think *Vampire Crawlers*' title is a bit of a mouthful, wait until you tackle the complexities of its game mechanics. Poncle's latest game is not only exceptional value for money, but offers a depth to its core mechanics that puts the Mariana Trench to shame.

Built around combos, each card you play has a number stamped into it from zero to three, and if you have enough mana and play them in the right order, you'll rapidly raise the attack and defence power of your cards. Kill enough monsters and you'll raise your level which either rewards you with a new card or a gem that can be slotted onto an existing card, granting it even more power – from tripling the amount of damage it does to even changing its card value.

Crawlers are heroes who investigate the dungeons and can be unlocked by rescuing them from coffins. Initially you start off with just one who adds his own unique abilities to your run whenever his card is played. The longer you play the more Crawlers you unlock and as you'd expect they all have their own unique strengths and weaknesses.

As play continues and you meet your inevitable end you'll be taken back to a hub village where you can spend any money acquired in the various shops that get built as you delve further into the game. With its fast-paced combat and charming pixel look, *Vampire Crawlers* is a brilliant, accessible deckbuilder. If you've ever been interested in the genre, this is the perfect place to start.

>> **Score 90%**



» [PC] You'll always know how much damage will be dealt to you, so do your best to counter it as best you can.

» [PC] Dungeons are small, but compact and typically consist of five increasingly difficult levels to tackle.

Bubsy 4D

» **System:** PS5 (tested), PS4, Switch, Swich 2, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PC
» **Buy it for:** £17. 99 (digital), £44.99 (physical)
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail

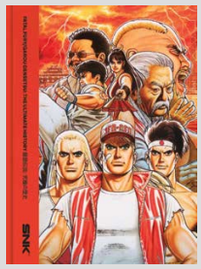
To say this is the best *Bubsy* game by a fair distance is not saying much. Making amends for the disaster that was *Bubsy 3D* on the PS1, this new entry sees the plucky bobcat find, or rather discover, his 3D platforming form. For that revelation we must thank developer Fabaz, which has taken the approach it used most recently in *Demon Tides* to deliver a 3D platformer that feels fluid and rarely fussy. Perhaps its true appeal lies in Bubsy's 'hairball' form, where he rolls and bounces around stages at speed, actively encouraging speedrunning. If you're still not convinced, try out the demo.

MARTYN CARROLL

>> **Score 70%**

Fatal Fury/Garou Densetsu: The Ultimate History

» **Buy it for:** £34.99
» **Buy it from:** bitmapbooks.com



You know exactly what you're getting with Bitmap Books and this lavish, 470-page celebration of SNK's fighting series does not disappoint. All the games are covered and for each of the main entries you'll find a brief overview of the game, a selection of concept art pulled from SNK's archives and numerous screens and sprites showcasing the 2D art style. This extensive coverage (that thankfully doesn't resort to printing movelists) is preceded by a 32-page series history that features comments from the key people involved in the series, including SNK fighting supremo Yasuyuki Oda. It concludes with more entertaining and honest commentary from the team in Q&A format. The book is visually led, but it's a beautifully designed, premium product that fans will treasure… the perfect accompaniment to Bitmap's previous *King Of Fighters* book.

MARTYN CARROLL

Legacy Of Kain: Defiance Remastered

» **System:** PS5 (tested), PC, PS4, Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, » **Buy it for:** £19.99
» **Buy it from:** Online

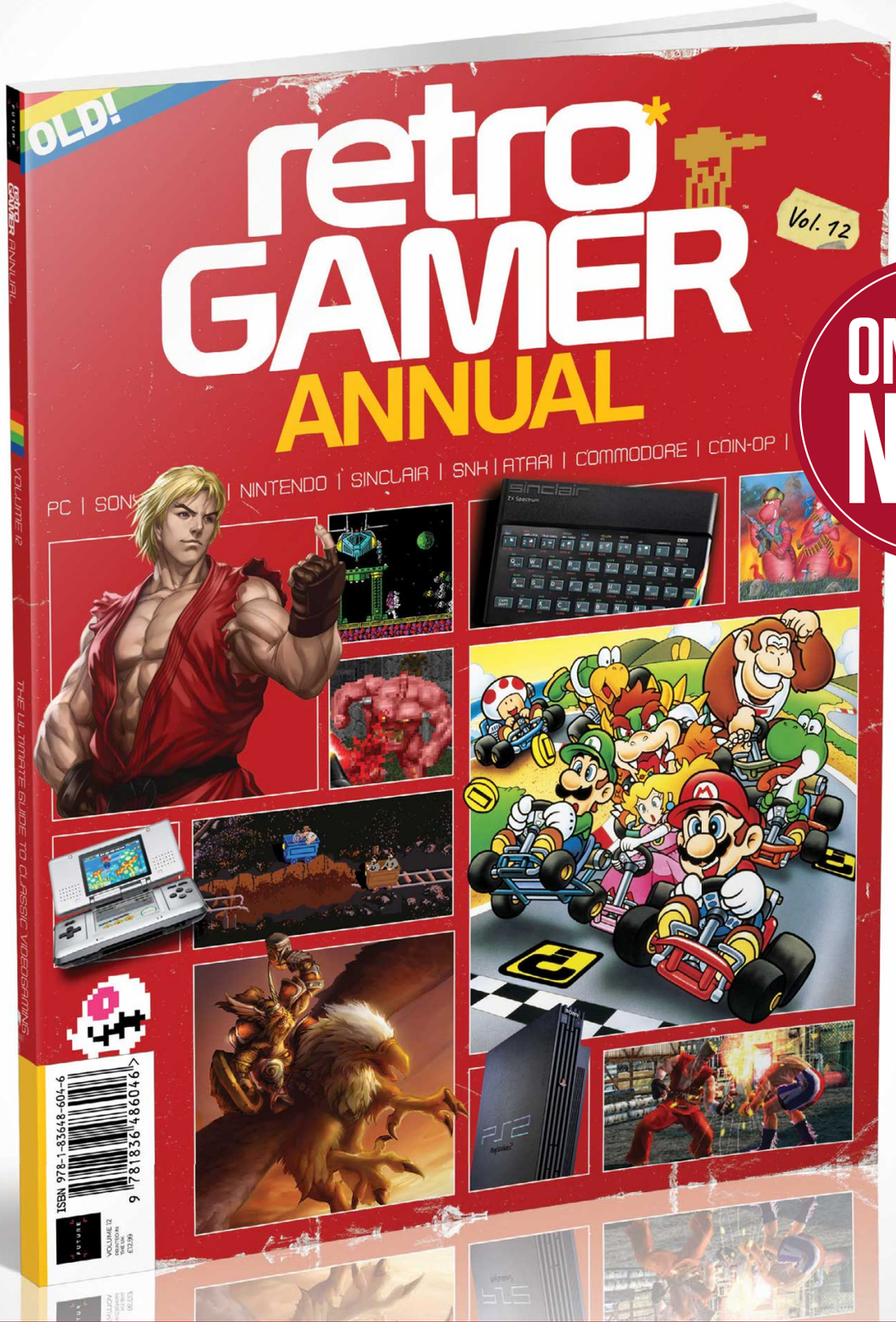
It's not the best game in the series, but *Defiance* comes close, bringing the Kain and Raziel storylines together in a satisfying conclusion. This remaster adds performance and visual upgrades to an already solid, fine-looking game. There are two key reasons for choosing this over the original release. The first is the new, fully controllable camera that replaces the original's frustrating fixed camera system (easily the most 'defiant' thing about the game). The second is the library of bonus stuff, specifically The Lost Levels. These stages were dropped during development of the original and it's great to finally play them.

MARTYN CARROLL

>> **Score 85%**

CELEBRATE THE BEST OF RETRO GAMING IN 2025

Our latest tome features an incredible amount of fantastic content from Retro Gamer's past 12 months. Iconic characters, huge franchises and classic systems all feature, making it an essential read for retro fans. Don't miss it!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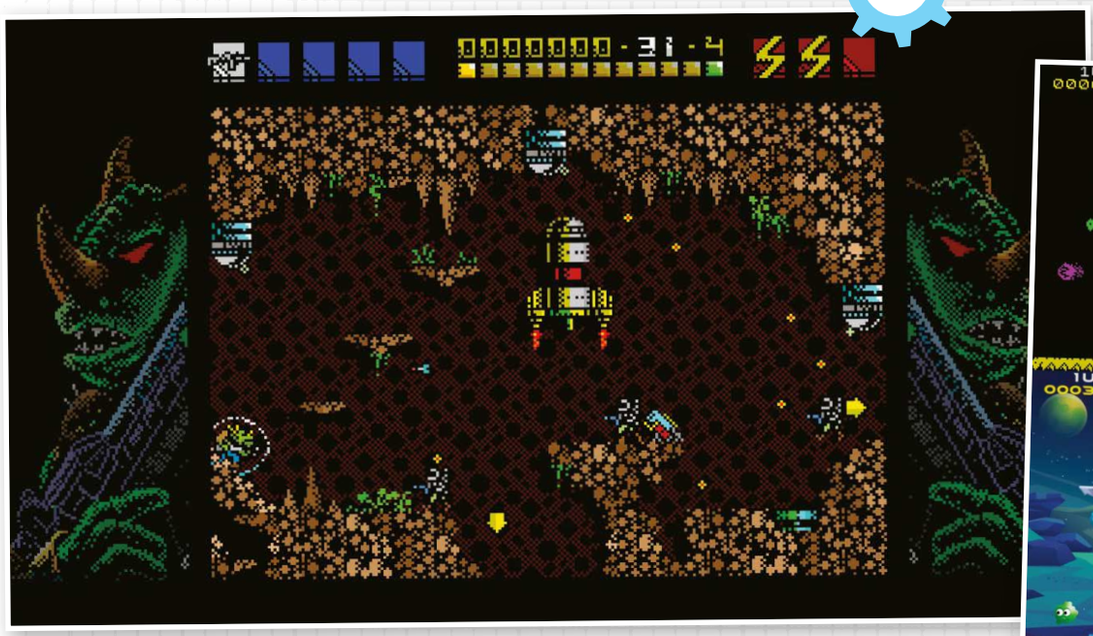
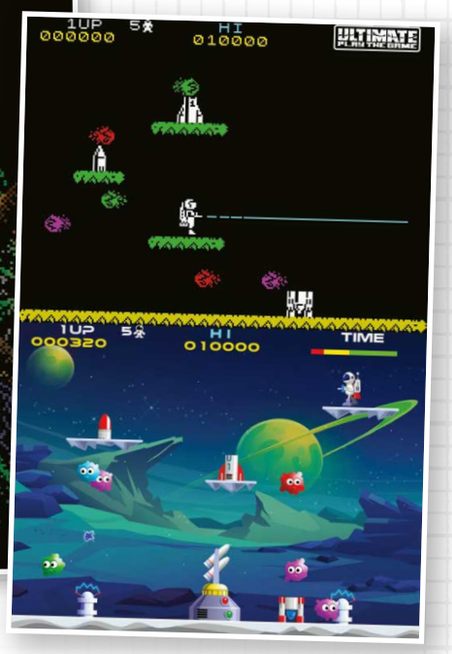




<!--- [PC] THE RECENT REX FEATURES MUSIC BY LEE BEE AND AN ENHANCED PALETTE. --->

<!--- [PC] RICHARD'S LATEST IS A CONVERSION OF THE ULTIMATE CLASSIC JETPAC, WITH MULTIPLE OPTIONS FOR GRAPHICS AND GAMEPLAY. --->

<INTRO> WE ARE COVERING A WIDE RANGE OF MACHINES THIS MONTH. OUR MAIN FEATURE LOOKS AT RICHARD LANGFORD'S PC REMAKES OF CLASSIC SPECTRUM GAMES, WHILE OUR CHAMPION CODER HAS JUST RELEASED HIS FIRST PHYSICAL GAMES FOR THE NEO GEO POCKET COLOR. THE REVIEWS COVER THE BBC, NES AND A CRACKING NEW GAME BOY PLATFORMER, THE NEWS FEATURES SEVERAL GREAT CONVERSIONS, AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO A FORTHCOMING RPG FOR THE VENERABLE APPLE. ENJOY THE VARIETY ON OFFER! </INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

NEW NOSTALGIA

<INTRO> RICHARD LANGFORD BRINGS BACK PRECIOUS MEMORIES WITH HIS EXCELLENT SPECTRUM REMAKES FOR THE PC, CREATED USING GAMEMAKER </INTRO>

<BODY> **Richard's first love was cartoons, and he started drawing on the Amiga.** This led to him remaking Spectrum games *The Pyramid* and *Cookie* using AMOS. Nowadays, he uses GameMaker and you can find his work at langfordproductions.com "I think having used AMOS, I had a bit of a head start with GameMaker, and there are countless tutorial videos which helped," Richard tells us. "I use GameMaker GML code to put the games together. I learn a few new commands with every game! For pixel art, I tend to use GameMaker's built-in sprite editor. For hi-res graphics, I use Serif DrawPlus – I still use the old software as it can do basic animation. I tend to draw the game characters and the title screen art with pen and paper, scan them in, and manually 'trace' the vectors."

So how does Richard choose which games to remake? "Sometimes I want to take a very simple game that isn't going to be too difficult to recreate and then throw the kitchen sink at it, adding all sorts

PRIME PRODUCTIONS

<INTRO> RICHARD TALKS US THROUGH HIS FAVOURITE PC CREATIONS SO FAR </INTRO>

PROJECT ZX 1.5

<Richard is very proud of this interesting title, telling us, "This used the best bits from *Project ZX 1* and *2*, a lot of fun to put together". Give it a try and see what you think. />

HIGHWAY ENCOUNTER

<"I was really pleased to get the isometric 3D working," Richard tells us about this cracking adaptation of Costa Panayi's game. "I'd like to have a crack at another isometric game." />

MR HAIR AND THE FLY REDUX

<"The map is around four times bigger, there are cutscenes, boss fights, new game mechanics, and Pedro Pimenta revamped the music!" />

MONKEY PLANT

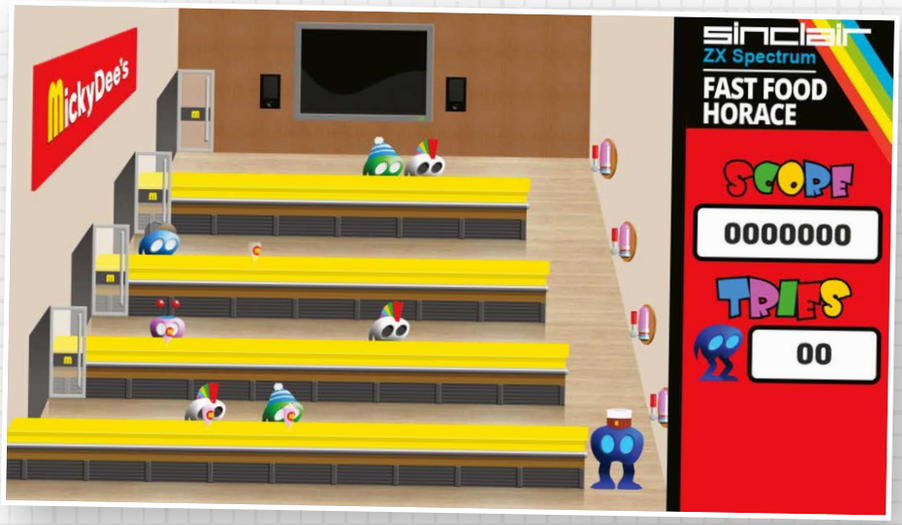
<"An original game with a very retro feel from an idea by Andy Green (who has produced some amazing Spectrum loading screens)." We really like this one, so give it a try. />

BAT 'N' BALL

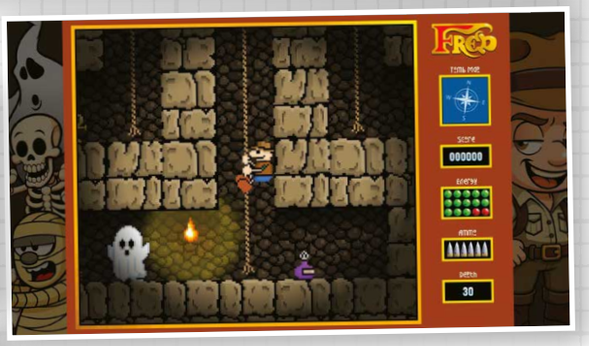
<"This started life as a remake of *Arkanoid*," says Richard. "But it ended up with different-shaped levels, sideways screens, exploding blocks, falling blocks… the list goes on." />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**



<!--- [PC] HORACE SPENDS TIME AS A BARTENDER IN THE UTTERLY SPLENDID ADVENTURES OF HORACE. --->



<!--- [PC] AMONG RICHARD'S UNFINISHED PROJECTS IS A REMAKE OF THE ARCADE GAME KANGAROO. --->

<!--- RICHARD STARTED PROGRAMMING WITH THE AMIGA LANGUAGE AMOS BEFORE DISCOVERING GAMEMAKER ON PC. --->

of options, animations and extra screens," he tells us. "Sometimes I'll find a game that may have a mechanic or feature that's going to be a challenge, or something I've not done before. The random maze generator for *Fred* is a good example of this, and the whole of Rex was a challenge! I did contact Jas Austin, who wrote the original. It was good to hear from him some of the tricks he used to make the Spectrum game, and in some cases, quite surprising that we used the same methods to get certain things to work. Another challenge was getting the player movement exactly right for *Manic Miner*. It's such a popular game that people have played to death that it had to be spot on."

Richard's most complex game so far was *The Utterly Splendid Adventures Of Horace*. "I started it many years ago, and I started again from scratch using GameMaker 2. I didn't go anywhere with it until I had permission to use the character, which the IP holder was more than happy with – then there was no stopping me! I just went for it to see how many games I could get Horace into. I had *Q*Bert*, *Pengo*, *Burger Time*, *Tapper*, *Hunchback*, *Space Invaders* and even a suggestion of *Jetpac* and *Lunar Jetman*. This game took me well over a year to finish completely."

So what would be his dream game to remake? "I keep going back and looking into Don Priestley's brilliant *Trap Door*. I'm so looking forward to recreating Berk and his pals! And I'd like to work with Steve Watson – he is another very prolific creator of Spectrum remakes. We chat a lot online, and it would be good to pool our resources and work on an original game together." </BODY>

<!--- [BBC MASTER] GETTING TOLD OFF BY THE COOL TEACHER, WHO YOU CAN RENAME IN ROB CAMERON'S SKOOL DAZE CONVERSION. --->

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Amstrad CPC Plus:** CP Soft is working on a brilliant conversion of *Q*Bert*, so try the latest update that's at bit.ly/qbert-cpcplus />

<**BBC Micro:** Rob Cameron has converted the Spectrum classic *Skool Daze* for Master and Compact users (pictured above). Get schooled at bit.ly/skooldaze-bbc />

<**Game Boy:** Take on the first case of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* in 2-Bit Crook's excellent demake. We've no objection if you visit bit.ly/aceattorney-gb />

<**Jaguar:** *BurgerTom* is OCEO's brilliant conversion of the arcade game *BurgerTime*. Munch your way over to bit.ly/burger-jaguar />

<**Master System:** LackofTrack entered their proof-of-concept *Super Mario Bros World 1-1* demo into the recent SMS Power competition. You'll find it at bit.ly/mario-sms />

<**Mega Drive:** The classic indie platformer *Cave Story* arrives thanks to andwhyisit, with support for multiple languages and 6-button controllers. Get exploring at bit.ly/cavestory-md />

<**MSX:** Mastropiero is back again, this time with *Super Pac-Man* for any MSX model. Find it at bit.ly/superpac-msx />

<**NES:** 'It's not the destination, it's the journey' was the theme of the recent Byte-Off VI contest for NESmaker games. NESmaker is rebranding soon as the new look Retro Game Forge. There's more info over at bit.ly/byteoffvi />

<**SNES:** The SNES Dev Game Jam 2026 runs from 31 July to 31st October, with a 512 K limit. Check it out at bit.ly/snes2026 />

<**ZX Spectrum:** Kevin Toms and Glen Anderson released the updated *Football Manager International – 2026 World Cup Edition* with all 48 teams through Midnight Brew Games, free to download for 48K and 128K machines at bit.ly/fm2026-zx />

CHAMPION CODER

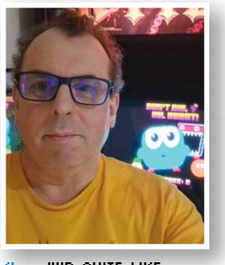
CHRIS AHCHAY

<INTRO> CHRIS IS WORKING WITH INFINITE STATE GAMES TO BRING ITS TITLES TO SNK'S HANDHELD </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: GODALMING, SURREY WEBSITE: AHCHAY.COM/NGPC / INFINITESTATEGAMES.ITCH.IO FORMAT: NEO GEO POCKET COLOR PREVIOUS GAMES: DON'T DIE MR ROBOT, FRUITY PALS' REVENGE WORKING ON: HORATIO GOES SNOWBOARDING, ROGUE ACES JR />

WHAT GOT YOU INTO DEVELOPING FOR THE NEO GEO POCKET, CHRIS?

<Around 1999, I discovered people trying to get homebrew running. That turned into a C framework, and I was hooked. Over the last 25 years, I've written demos and small games – mainly conversions like *Mr Do!*, *Robotron* and *Joust*. I was quite pleased with *Barbarian Invaders*, based on the description of a *Space Invaders*-type machine in Terry Pratchett's *The Colour Of Magic*./>



<!--- "I'D QUITE LIKE TO DO A POCKET COLOR VERSION OF POOYAN – A CRIMINALLY UNDERRATED GAME IN MY OPINION," SAYS CHRIS. --->

WHAT DO YOU CURRENTLY USE FOR CREATING GAMES?

<My development environment is manually-coded C compiled with the Toshiba T900 compiler, edited in VS Code with custom build scripts. The framework gives me common functions – creating sprites, managing tiles, etc. (The framework developer is looking to create a GB Studio-style engine.) For graphics, I use NeoTile. Furnace Tracker and added NGPC support a couple of years ago. I have all the tools and tutorials on my website at ahchay.com/NGPC />

WHAT MADE YOU CONVERT DON'T DIE, MR ROBOT?

<Pure love for the original! Mike and Charlie have been fantastically supportive; with Mike working on the music, it was less than a month between the demo and the first release. />

HOW DIFFICULT WAS IT TO GET PHYSICAL COPIES CREATED?

<There were false starts; I considered doing a crowdfunded campaign with two games for around £80. I then stumbled across the Gamebank USB linker and flash carts. I've got in touch with the supplier and can hopefully guarantee a regular supply of carts. I'm using repurposed Everdrive boxes and printing manuals/slipcases at home. I get cart labels produced professionally. I'd also like to thank Rob Fearon for his amazing artwork. />

SO WHAT'S NEXT?

<*Horatio Goes Snowboarding* will be released any day now. *Rogue Aces Jr* needs a bit more polishing. Then a sequel to ISG's *Family Tree/Frutorious* called *Back To My Fruits*, and an old-school wave shooter called *Gardenia*. I'm looking into NES and Game Boy development, but my heart will always be with the little clicky sticks of the Neo Geo Pocket. />

<!--- [NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] THE AMBITIOUS DEFENDEROIDS DEMO MIXES ELEMENTS OF DEFENDER, ASTEROIDS, SINISTAR, SPACE INVADERS, LEMMINGS, AND QIX. --->

<!--- [NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] FRUITY PALS' REVENGE IS BASED ON THE SAME GAME BY JAPANESE DEVELOPER KUNIAKI 'MORISUKE' MORIBE. --->

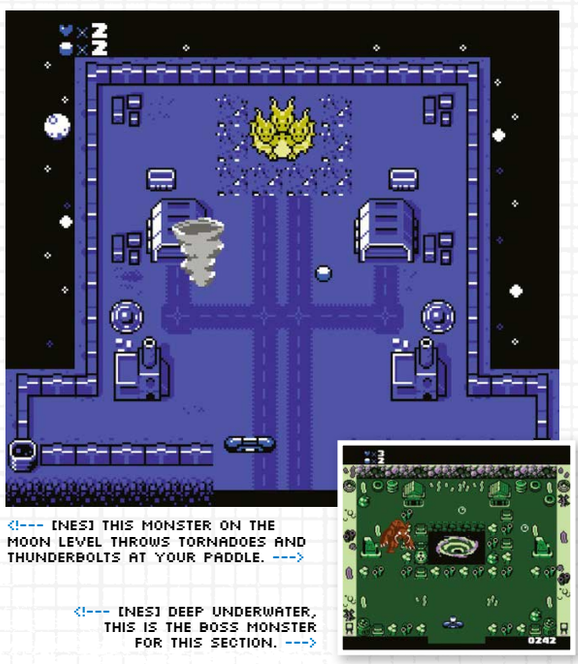
DATA BURST

MEGA KAIJU BOOM BALL

<INFO FORMAT: NES, STEAM CREDITS: OREBODY INC. (INCLUDING JOHN VANDERHOEF AND JORDAN DAVIS) PRICE: $9.99 (NES DOWNLOAD) / $7.99 (STEAM) / $70 PLUS POSTAGE (PHYSICAL NES CART) WEB: BIT.LY/MEGAKAIJU / BIT.LY/MEGAKAIJU-STEAM / BIT.LY/MEGAKAIJU-CART />

<BODY> **What happens when you cross *Arkanoid* with Godzilla-sized monsters?** You get *Mega Kaiju Boom Ball*. Giant aliens have invaded eight different locations, terrorising the locals. BOOM – Ballistic Operations and Occupation Military – deploys its prototype Bumper and Ball weapon to fight back. Hitting the ball into a monster causes damage, as well as damaging buildings (but the General excuses the collateral damage in a funny cutscene). Once enough hits have been done, the ball can be launched vertically into the next screen. However, dropping the ball off the base of the screen returns to the previous screen, resetting the monster. In the fourth screen of each location, the monster can be destroyed, but it will have additional attacks to stop you. Vehicles and other military equipment can be hit to cause extra damage if they connect with the monster. Later locations add portals to teleport the ball or an extra monster to help you – or the enemy. Power-ups drop from destroyed buildings and can be caught, including a laser with limited shots to do more damage or an extra ball to hit around. This interesting mix of mechanics plays well but can be frustrating if you drop the ball. Extra modes, including the Boss Rush Stadium, add to the game's longevity. This is an unusual and enjoyable title funded by Kickstarter and now on Steam. </BODY>

SCORE: 87%



<!--- [NES] THIS MONSTER ON THE MOON LEVEL THROWS TORNADOES AND THUNDERBOLTS AT YOUR PADDLE. --->

<!--- [NES] DEEP UNDERWATER, THIS IS THE BOSS MONSTER FOR THIS SECTION. --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

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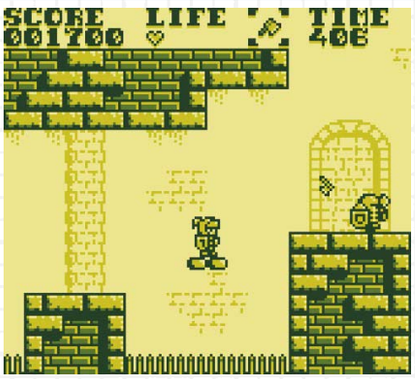
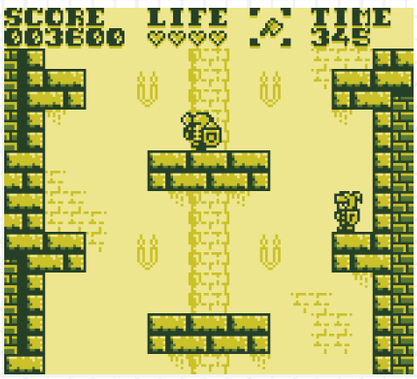


<!--- [GAME BOY] MOVING LIFTS AND DISAPPEARING PLATFORMS CAN HELP YOU OVER SPIKE-FILLED PITS. --->



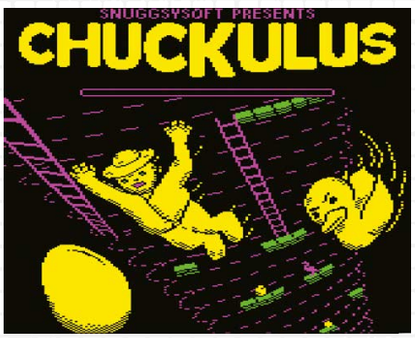
<!--- [GAME BOY] VERTICAL SECTIONS WHERE THE KNIGHT MUST CLIMB UP OR DOWN BRING VARIETY. --->

BLACK CASTLE II

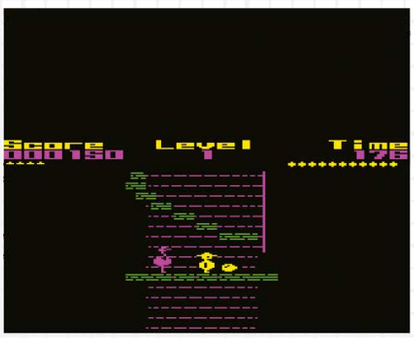
<INFO FORMAT: GAME BOY CREDITS: USEROX7F (DESIGN, PROGRAMMING, GRAPHICS), RETRO ASOBI (MUSIC) PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD / PLAY ONLINE WEB: BIT.LY/BLACKCASTLE2 />

<BODY> **The villain of the original *Black Castle*, Malakar The Warlock, has returned, taking Lyra to sacrifice her in a ritual for more power.** Lyra's brother, Aric, picks up his sword and heads off to defeat the warlock again and save his sister. Drawing on classic *Castlevania* and *Super Mario Bros* titles, there are five large stages split into smaller sections, with hidden secrets and extra weapons to discover. Boss creatures are waiting at the end of each level before you face Malakar in the ultimate battle. Smooth and well-defined graphics give the game a great atmosphere, and the music throughout is excellent. This sequel greatly refines and improves on the original, which is also worth playing. </BODY>

SCORE: 88%



<!--- [ELECTRON] THIS GREAT LOADING PICTURE APPEARS AFTER SELECTING FROM TWO DIFFERENT KEYSETS. --->



<!--- [ELECTRON] LEARNING WHERE THE EGGS ARE WILL HELP; THE BIRD SEED GIVES BONUS POINTS. --->

CHUCKULUS

<INFO FORMAT: ACORN ELECTRON CREDITS: SNUGGSY187 PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD / PLAY ONLINE WEB: BIT.LY/CHUCKULUS />

<BODY> **Previewed back in RG 273, this innovative title mixes the classic platformer *Chuckie Egg* with the rotating towers of *Nebulus*.** Henhouse Harry must climb ladders and jump gaps to collect all the eggs on a level before the time runs out, without making contact with the mutant chickens or falling off the bottom of the level. The graphical effect is really impressive for the hardware, the graphics feel authentic to the original *Chuckie Egg*, and the sound fits perfectly. This is a really challenging game for the eggheads out there. Don't miss it. </BODY>

SCORE: 84%

PROCESSING

<INTRO> EMMANUEL CASTELLO IS CREATING THE NEW APPLE II RPG ANDORIA, INSPIRED BY THE CLASSIC ULTIMA IV </INTRO>

<BODY> **Emmanuel was inspired to create *Andoria* after watching The 8-Bit Guy's videos.** "I wondered whether, at 49, I would be able to write a game in assembly language – something I had never done before. Of all the games, *Ultima IV* was the most mind-blowing – the first true open-world game. So I decided to create an *Ultima*-style game, with the idea of making some adjustments." Written using an online compiler and the AppleWin emulator, data tables created in a spreadsheet are pasted into the emulated Apple II's RAM.

A demo is currently available via andoria.neocities.org "The demo version is simply a preview of the gameplay, featuring a limited map, weapons, and vehicles. The finished game will include the full map (65,000 tiles), the complete storyline, dungeons, and the very important Vessel—a ship where you can store food, water, and gold, and dive beneath the sea with a diving suit in search of special items and treasures." Emmanuel is planning a boxed physical edition as well as a digital download, so explore *Andoria* now. </BODY>

<!--- [APPLE II] LORD RICHARD TELLS YOU AT THE START OF THE DEMO THAT SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAS HAPPENED TO YOUR VILLAGE. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

ARCADE CONVERSIONS ON THE COMMODORE 64

The team get together to discuss the best and worst ports for Commodore's 8-bit micro

DARRAN JONES

MARTYN CARROLL

TIM EMPEY

With the C64 on our cover and a couple of new pieces of hardware announced, it felt like the right time to look at the system's many arcade conversions. Tim, Martyn and Darran wind back the clock.

DARRAN

So what's the first arcade conversion you remember playing on the C64 and what impression did it leave on you?

MARTYN

There were so many great coin-op conversions for the C64. I think the first one I played was *Commando* from Elite, written by Chris Butler I think. It was absolutely brilliant. The Speccy version was good but the C64 version was better. Somehow I also remember playing a censored version where all the enemies were turned into robots. I think it was called *Space Invasion*.

TIM

I think it might have been *Space Harrier*. My brother and I pooled our pocket money together and went halves on it. Pretty sure it was a tenner in Boots. And when we got it home… it was honestly a bit meh. Having played it in the arcade, it was quite a step down in quality.

MARTYN

It was, but still pretty impressive for an 8-bit computer. That game was another one by Chris Butler, he was brilliant when it came to coin-op conversions. He also did *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Power Drift*, both superb.

DARRAN

I think for me, the first that really left an impression was *Bubble Bobble*. It genuinely felt arcade perfect compared to the Amstrad version. Did anyone else get to play it?

MARTYN

Yes, the Speccy version was good, but again, eclipsed by the C64 version. Probably the best two-player game.

TIM

Not on the C64, possibly on the Amiga. But again I did play it in the arcade, so it didn't look arcade perfect to me.

MARTYN

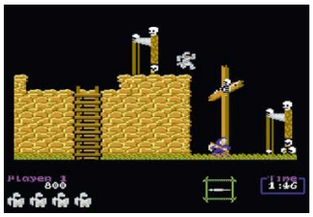
What about the sequel Tim, *Rainbow Islands*? That was also really good on the C64. Great music, as you'd expect.

TIM

That was another Amiga one for me, and it did look nearly arcade perfect to my young eyes at the time. I did quite enjoy *Green Beret* on the C64, incredibly difficult though!

MARTYN

Green Beret was the hardest game ever. I've been grabbing screens for the C64 cover feature, and I've forgotten how hard some of the games are. It's a bit of a nightmare, trying to make sure not every screen is from the opening level.



» [C64] US Gold released some great C64 conversions, including *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*.

DARRAN

I recall *Ghosts 'N Goblins* being a pretty good effort. It was another Elite game as well. Was there any developer that stood out as the most consistent for good arcade conversions?

MARTYN

US Gold was pretty reliable. The *OutRun* games were all good, especially *Turbo*. And *Ghosts 'N Goblins* was amazing. Very difficult, again

DARRAN

You clearly never played the Amstrad version of *Out Run*, it was absolutely terrible, Mart. I'd probably agree with you though. I actually thought Ocean was quite hit and miss with its conversions on the C64.

TIM

Well there was *Short Circuit* and *Cobra*, which came as part of the *Magnificent Seven* pack and they weren't great, but I still played them.

» [C64] *Chase HQ* was a real misfire on the C64 and not a patch on Ocean's other home versions.

» [C64] The original might have been disappointing, but *Chase HQ*'s sequel was a lot more impressive on Commodore's machine.

» [C64] *Green Beret* was a polished conversion, but it was also extremely tough.

MARTYN

Lots of hits from Ocean, but some low points too. *Chase HQ* is probably the worst. The sequel was quite a bit better. *Cobra* was poor on the C64 compared to the Spectrum version, but then the Spectrum version was very much a Joffa Smith joint. He basically ignored the movie and did whatever he wanted!

DARRAN

We're getting side-tracked by Ocean's film licences. So why do we think that the C64 had a lot of decent arcade conversions. What typically made them stand out?

MARTYN

The graphics mainly – full-screen scrolling, hardware sprites, plenty of colours. It was conceivable to replicate the look of the coin-op, easier than say on some other systems. And of course the SID chip.

TIM

Yeah it was a bit easier to make the graphics closer to the arcade game than other home computers. And that SID chip music always impressed me, and made the loading times go a bit easier. I occasionally look up the Ocean loading music.

DARRAN

As much as I loved the Amstrad, it often struggled with arcade conversions. It did spank the C64 with offerings like *Renegade*, *Gryzor* and *Target: Renegade*, but generally, I was often envious of my C64-owning friends. Did anyone play *Buggy Boy*? That was damned impressive.

» [C64] *Space Harrier* might not have looked as good as the arcade original, but it absolutely obliterated the Amstrad conversion.

> "It was conceivable to replicate the look of the coin-op, easier"
> MARTYN CARROLL

MARTYN

Buggy Boy was excellent. Some people say it's better than the coin-op, more playable thanks to the smaller graphics. I'm not sure about that, but it runs it pretty close.

DARRAN

Yeah, I reckon most wouldn't have actually played it in the arcades. It was very, very good though. Has anyone played any of the recent homebrew releases? That *Puzzle Bobble* looks absolutely fantastic.

MARTYN

I've not, but will check it out. I remember a new version of *Ghosts 'N Goblins* too that was more faithful (the original missed out a bunch of levels). I need to give it a go.

TIM

Nah, the only homebrew I do is making booze (and I don't even do that, to be honest). ✱

» [C64] The racing in *Buggy Boy* is fantastic and it leaves the other 8-bit conversions on the starting line.

» [C64] Darran was very jealous of the C64 conversion of *OutRun* as it was terrible on the Amstrad.

READERS REACT

The C64 conversions that left an impact on you

Simon Lock
Software Creation's port of *Bubble Bobble*. Graphically it may show some limitations of the platform, but the gameplay and music are both very much there. Punches well above its weight, let alone for what would normally just be a cash grab port arcade conversion for any other publisher/developer.

Pixel Cherry Ninja
I think the recent *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* is mind-blowing.

Scott
That would be *OutRun*. Even though it's nowhere near the best game on the C64, I remember we would play the game for ages, while playing the original soundtrack on cassette.

Martin Lindell
Hands down *Bubble Bobble*! Great game that got a great conversion. We played it like crazy and it's definitively one of my top C64 favourites. I've still got The Hit Squad edition on my shelf for display.

Bloggo's Pow!
Slap Fight. Feels and looks like the arcade game and IIRC all fits in one load.

Arctic Panda Popz
The NewZealand Story, Tiki The Kiwi is so cute and awesome. Plus the music is ingrained into my brain. Such a catchy tune.

Brian Kelly
It definitely wasn't *Rastan*! And yes, I am still bitter about it!

Fleetwoodmatt
The first three games I played on the C64 were *Spy Hunter*, *Dig Dug*, and *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*. Those games kicked off a nearly 40-year love affair with the C64!

Jerry Bonner
Spy Hunter is one that comes to mind right off the top of my head...

Simon Cowley
Buggy Boy was phenomenal at the time and still stands up now. No crazy cabinet to sit in but still bags of fun.

minsoft
It's a tie between *1942* and *Bomb Jack*. They were the first C64 games I played... actually I think the first commercial/non-educational home-computer games I played.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

GAMESMASTER GOLDEN JOYSTICK

"I got this by winning a challenge on the TV show. Many people don't realise that most winners didn't get to keep the joystick."

AMOUNT PAID: NOTHING

THE OCARINA OF TIME SIGNED BY SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

"I was queueing for quite a while for his appearance at the London Virgin Megastore in 2004 to launch *The Minish Cap*."

AMOUNT PAID: NOTHING

THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS

"I bought it off eBay in 2004. How little we knew what it was going to be worth 20 years hence."

AMOUNT PAID: £44

BIO

NAME:
Mat Allen

LOCATION:
Horsham, UK

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£60,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Commodore 64

FAVOURITE GAME:
The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

COMMODORE ALLEN REPORTING

Mat Allen shows off his eclectic mix of memorabilia, computers and memories

Words by Faith Johnson

Many readers may recognise the name Mat Allen, as he contributed to Retro Gamer in the magazine's early years. Speaking of being the interviewee rather than the interviewer, he said that, "It's a curious feeling being the subject of a **Retro Gamer** article rather than the creator." Mat currently writes for the relaunched *Zzap!64* magazine from Fusion Retro Books, and is involved in several other retro projects, including contributing to modern releases of retro games.

We start by asking Mat about his earliest gaming memories. "It's probably my parents buying one variety of Binatone's *Pong* clone console, daubed in the traditional Seventies tasteful colours of orange and brown," he begins. "After it died via the also very Seventies method of leaking batteries, they obtained a six-switch Woody 2600, which is where I really started to cut my teeth."

This started a lifelong dedication not just to playing but also collecting games. Things really took off for Mat once his parents bought him a C64. "I found myself in one of those fortunate positions where I never needed to sell my current system to fund the next one," Mat explains. "Blame my parents, they were the ones who bought the C64, apparently because it had a proper keyboard and not the squishy mush of the Spectrum. On such things futures are made. *Impossible Mission* is a beating part of my soul, and I will forever be connected to it." This love for *Impossible Mission* would be crowned when Mat had the opportunity to interview its programmer, Dennis Caswell, which Mat describes as "staggering".

Mat has also helped bring modern retro projects to life and has the enviable experience of meeting Llamasoft legend Jeff Minter multiple times. "Meeting Jeff again at Zzap! Live was special as I hadn't seen him in ages, and I'd contributed quite a significant number of scans and images towards the Digital Eclipse project in the archive section. It's always useful to have the items yourself to photograph because you then don't have to worry about copyright issues."

We finish up asking Mat what his collecting Grail is. "It comes down to a choice of two. Any prototype cartridges made by System 3 for the C64GS, if they still exist, that never ended up being released in that format. Or *Mr Boston* for the Vectrex. I had a shot at getting a complete copy twice, way back in the past and was beaten out both times, and nowadays even a loose copy is going for silly money. Or at least what I consider silly money." ✱

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

JEFF MINTER'S SPECTRUM

"I got this by winning a high-score contest on Jeff's new PC port of *Gridrunner* at a Llamasoft gathering in 2004. Boy, that was a good year!"

AMOUNT PAID: NOTHING

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

ORIGINAL BOB WAKELIN ARTWORK

■ "I bought them directly from Bob himself in 2000. In hindsight, quelle surprise, I should have bought more at the time."

PAID: £100 EACH

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

COMMODORE 64

Those looking to just play can pay as little as **£50,** but with everything in a box with manuals, the price can sail over **£100.** You'll pay even more if it includes games.

POLE POSITION (ATARI 2600)

The cost of getting on the podium is more Skoda than Rolls-Royce, as complete copies typically go for under **£10.**

SWORDS & SORCERY (ZX SPECTRUM)

You don't require much spell power if you want to conjure up a copy of this ambitious RPG, as complete copies cost about **£10.**

MANIAC MANSION (PC)

Grabbing a copy of Lucasfilm's adventure may send you mad, with prices ranging from **£50** to **£100** for complete ones.

TURBO OUTRUN (MEGA DRIVE)

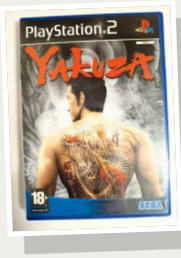
This disappointing conversion of Sega's arcade sequel is getting a lot rarer with complete copies now costing around **£40.** If you're not fussed about the manual, you should be able to find it for about **£30.**

SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS (GAME BOY)

You can grab a cartridge on its own for under **£10,** but those wanting complete copies will be shelling out as much as **£100.**

PUSH-OVER (AMIGA)

Boxed copies in poor condition have sold for around **£15,** while good-condition copies can go for as much as **£30.**



YAKUZA (PLAYSTATION 2)

Who says crime doesn't pay? Complete copies of Sega's masterpiece cost over **£20,** with mint copies costing as much as **£50.**

BOMBERMAN HERO (NINTENDO 64)

You'll blow your budget on this, as a complete copy will often sell for over **£100!** A cartridge on its own should cost around **£20.**

HOW MUCH?!

SIGN O' THE TIMES

This collector really signed off on their love for Mario and the NES when they spent over **£1,000** purchasing this rather fetching original NES shop sign.

Prices correct at time of print

» [PlayStation 2] Silent Hill, caught in the grip of a snow storm. Not the most inviting prospect if we're totally honest.

SILENT HILL: SHATTERED MEMORIES

The Silent Hill series is highly coveted by collectors and one entry in particular commands a premium – the PlayStation 2 version of Silent Hill: Shattered Memories. Let's look at the game and why it has become so costly

Words by Martyn Carroll

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **» DEVELOPER:** CLIMAX STUDIOS
- **» PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2
- **» RELEASED:** 2010
- **» PRICE TODAY:** £250–£350

» The late release of *Shattered Memories* means the PS2 version of the game is now very expensive.

» [Wii] About to propose to your partner? This is a really great place to hide the ring. They'll love it.

THE GAME

Climax Studios had previously visited Silent Hill. Its 2007 game *Silent Hill: Origins*, the first in the main series not to be developed by Konami's Team Silent, served as a prequel to the original game and was developed for the Sony PSP (with a PS2 port following a few months later). While generally well received, the game received some criticism for adhering too closely to the *Silent Hill* template.

For its second visit, Climax chose to go bold. *Shattered Memories* appears to be a remake of the first game – Harry Mason is back, searching Silent Hill for his missing daughter – but it quickly becomes apparent that this is a full-blown reimagining rather than a retread. The main change is that Harry no longer gets to whack monsters around the head with a crowbar. He's now completely defenceless, which means when monsters appear, often the only option is to run. The game also looks to profile you psychologically, with your choices having an effect on the storyline and content as the mystery deepens.

Shattered Memories was developed for the Wii, so motion controls play a key role. You move the Wii Remote to shine your flashlight, for example, and audio messages are played through the controller's built-in speaker. This means that for the subsequent PS2 and PSP versions, the controls had to be reworked and the overall experience is inevitably lessened.

THE QUALITY

The lead Wii version received generally strong reviews, including 83% from *NGamer* and 86% from the *Official Nintendo Magazine*. The new approach was widely praised, as was the clever use of the Wii Remote, but the game's six-to-seven hour length was called into question. It seems impossible to find a

» [PlayStation 2] This game has clearly profiled us. Moving swiftly on…

» [Wii] With no weapons to hand, you should probably follow that on-screen prompt.

» [PlayStation 2] Nothing to see here. Just a bloody handprint smeared on the door. Looks fine.

print review of the actual PS2 version – the multiformat mags reviewed the Wii version while the PlayStation mags reviewed the PSP version.

However, IGN did update its Wii review with PS2-specific comments. "The game controls and looks best on Wii," wrote Matt Casamassina. "However, the PS2 iteration is no slouch, either. It very closely resembles the Wii incarnation and controls well enough with dual analog sticks." He awarded the PS2 version 8/10, which was less than the Wii version (8.6/10), but higher than the PSP version (7/10). Summarising his thoughts on *Shattered Memories*, he commented, "Climax has taken the series and run with it, crafting a title refreshingly different yet still at times quite scary."

WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

This is the classic case of an entry in a popular series that is overlooked and undersells on release. As mentioned, *Shattered Memories* was developed as a Wii game and, according to the Climax team, the PS2 version was requested by Konami at the end of production to generate sales from regions where the PS2 was still a key platform (specifically South America). By the time the game was released in early 2010, we were more than three years into the PS3 era (and *Silent Hill: Homecoming* had already appeared on that system), so *Shattered Memories* did not sell in great numbers. It actually debuted in fifth position on the UK PS2 sales chart in February 2010, but we have to remember that overall PS2 game sales were very low by this point in time and the chart was dominated by yearly sports updates, *Lego* games and licensed fodder. Actual sales numbers of the PS2 version are unknown.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

If you're a strict PlayStation collector then the PSP version is the one to search for, as you can currently pick it up complete for around £70-£80. Otherwise, the obvious choice is the Wii release, as this was the lead version designed around the console's motion controls. The Wii version best represents the team's vision for a reimagined *Silent Hill*, so if you're a fan, this is the recommended choice. Plus, as an added bonus, it's the most affordable version, typically selling for £50-£60. Unlike some of the other series entries, there is no digital release available. The PSP version was once available on PSN, but it was delisted in 2014.

If you're simply looking for some retro chills, go grab the PS2 version of series high point *Silent Hill 2*. (Tip: look for the Platinum Range rerelease which is actually the expanded *Director's Cut*.)

THE BOTTOM LINE

While the high value of *Shattered Memories* has surprised many, it's worth remembering that the series is active with another new game (*Silent Hill: Townfall*) arriving this year. This current relevance is surely driving up prices of the earlier releases, and should the series go on hiatus again (as it did from 2012 to 2024), those prices will likely settle. Regardless of its monetary value, the game stands up as a brave and sometimes brilliant take on the *Silent Hill* formula. ✱

I'VE GOT IT!

We asked readers if they owned the game on PS2

Psi/Ben
Sadly not. To be honest, I actually just want the Wii version personally.

Kethy
I don't have this on the PS2, but I do have it on the Wii.

retrowolle
I have it for the PS2, Wii and PSP. Got them used at least ten years ago. I paid around 10 Euros for each game.

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

MAGAZINE MEMORIES

Martyn Carroll discovers that print's charming

Back To The Noughties has run its course, and as you will have seen in this issue, we've turned the clock right back to the beginning of the Eighties. I only put together the final few Noughties entries, but the experience was absorbing – and alarming. It was alarming because my memories of that time – late-2009 – are a blur, at least when it comes to gaming. I would have had a PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 by then, but instead of buying the latest releases, I remember playing a lot of PlayStation 2 games with my daughter, who was very young at the time. Kids stuff like *Dora The Explorer*, *Winnie The Pooh* and *The Suffering*.

Anyway, this recall gap gave me the perfect excuse to dig out my old gaming mags and find out what I missed (in the name of research, of course). I've been buying print mags regularly since the mid-Eighties and I still own most of them, so I have a fair old library. They're all squirrelled away in plastic storage boxes at the back of the garage. Getting to them is an adventure in itself, but I was soon in my element, sitting on a seized-up exercise bike, flicking *through* old copies of *Edge*, *games™*, GamesMaster and *The Official UK PlayStation Magazine*.

Two things stuck me. The first was just how many different mags there were in the late-Noughties. Aside from those mentioned, the official Xbox and Nintendo mags were still going strong and there were loads of unofficial single-format titles too. For the Xbox alone there were four competing titles: *360*, *X360*, *Xbox World 360* and *360 Gamer*. There were a similar number of PlayStation mags too, plus *PC Gamer* and *PC Zone*. There's a sense of poignancy here, as most of these magazines have long since closed, some without even a decent send off – just a promise of the 'next issue' that we're still waiting for. *Edge*, *PC Gamer* and of course the mag you're reading are still on the newsstands, but many succumbed to shrinking readerships as gamers found what they wanted online instead. I continued to support print magazines during this time, but not as blindly I must admit.

The second thing to strike me is the actual contents of magazines from this era, which had evolved to combat the coverage found online. The classic formula of news, previews and reviews is alive and well, but I was surprised to find so many in-depth features. And this wasn't just during the lean summer months when there were hardly any new games to cover and it was a case of filling those pages with something, *anything*. You'll surely recall those desperate pictorial features where the mag team would pop around someone's pad to play party games, mess with gadgets and eat pizza. No, these were genuine features, looking at gaming from interesting angles and supplemented with lengthy developer interviews. As it's concerning then-modern titles, the interviews will have been passed through a PR filter, but there's still plenty of honest commentary and fascinating insight to be found.

For example, I've just grabbed a random mag from the pile I was using to research Back To The Noughties. I'm holding the November 2009 issue of *Xbox World 360* and it features the following: Bioware cofounder Greg Zeschuk talking about Western RPGs and *Dragon Age* DLC; Turn 10's Dan Greenawalt sizing up *Forza* against *Gran Turismo*; and the sadly-departed Martyn Brown on resurrecting Team 17's *Alien Breed* series. And here's another plucked from the pile – the *Official Nintendo Magazine* Christmas 2009 issue which includes: Warren Spector talking about the creation of *Epic Mickey*; Nintendo producer Kensuke Tanabe sharing the story behind the *Metroid Prime* games; and, Shigeru Miyamoto ruminating about the upcoming *Super Mario Galaxy 2* and the future of the Wii.

As you can see, this is not lightweight content. My advice is, if you're looking for something to read between issues of **RG**, go and dig out your old magazine collection, or grab some pre-owned copies (check out The Gaming Newsagent on Facebook). You might be surprised what you find in these monthly mags. ✱

PERFECT PUBLICATIONS

MY GO-TO GAMING MAGAZINE DURING THE NOUGHTIES ERA

EDGE

Not so much a magazine as an institution. I have a huge amount of respect for its writers and their views. And it's always the best place to read about new hardware.

GAMES™

Much more than Edge-lite, this multi-format mag stuck a lovely balance between contemporary game coverage and retro reminiscing.

NGAMER

Future's independent Nintendo magazine has a long history and it was still a must-read in its NGamer guise, covering the NDS and Wii years with a keen, critical eye.

PLAY

Another long-running mag, dating back to the launch of the PS1 and providing excellent coverage of Sony's systems. And don't forget its covermounted DVD.

> "Most of these mags have long since closed"
>
> **MARTYN CARROLL**

THE PLAY NAME WAS RESURRECTED IN 2021, AS THE NEW TITLE FOR PLAYSTATION OFFICIAL MAGAZINE UK.
THE NO.1 MAGAZINE FOR PLAYSTATION
PLAY
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY
PROJECT ZERO
14
RAINBOW SIX EXTRACTION
TALES OF ARISE
Elden Ring
EDGE
PLAYSTATION 3 VERSUS THE WORLD
PLEASE BE UPSTANDING FOR EDGE. THE MAGAZINE WAS LAUNCHED IN 1993 AND IS STILL GOING STRONG.
WHAT'S THIS? IT'S ONLY RG OLD BOY PAUL DRURY MOONLIGHTING IN EDGE IN 2007, WRITING ABOUT JET SET WILLY.

I'M SURE MANY LONG-TIME READERS CAN RELATE TO THIS. EVERY ISSUE OF RG, IN SIX HEFTY PILES.
ARRIVING IN 1998, SO PRE-NOUGHTIES, ARCADE WAS A SHORT-LIVED BUT MUCH-LOVED MAGAZINE. THIS LAUNCH ISSUE HAS BEEN READ TO DEATH.
WHO REMEMBERS THE EDGE SPIN-OFF RETRO? THIS 'MAKING OF' SPECIAL FROM 2002 IS TRULY FANTASTIC.
GAMES™ CLOSED SHOP IN 2018, BUT IT REMAINS A FIRM FAVOURITE WITH READERS.
I STUMBLED ON THESE IN THE GARAGE – ALMOST THE FULL RUN OF THE OFFICIAL UK PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE. MOST OF THE COVERDISCS ARE MISSING THOUGH, BAH.
TURN 10 TALKS UP FORZA MOTORSPORT 3 IN A 2009 ISSUE OF XBOX WORLD 360.

BLUESKY THINKING

Our Bluesky followers reveal their favourite Noughties mags

zebrachair
I subscribed to *Edge* and *games*™ in the Noughties. I owned multi formats, so wanted a multi-format mag. *games*™ was a breath of fresh air when it launched – lots of content, and not as po-faced as *Edge* could sometimes be. If 2000 counts, I'll add the end of *Arcade* too, sadly short-lived.

chewdiggy
games™ all the way. Didn't take itself too seriously, but also wasn't marketed to kids.

Arctic Panda Popz
I loved *games*™ for multi-format and *Cube* for my Nintendo magazine. *games*™ was well laid out and had some great covers and *Cube* came with free discs. I definitely miss this era of gaming magazines.

Enderbrace
The official PlayStation and Dreamcast mags were great. But my favourite, of any era, will always be *games*™. A wonderful mag that I still miss today.

Wodienfor Wolvo
Was originally the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, but that honour probably goes to *Edge*. The front covers, the detailed look at future games and the graphic design fascinated me.

Liam Richardson
Cube was the first magazine I ever truly fell in love with. I used to rush to the newsagents every month to pick up a copy. Their E3 issues were immense!

Sean Deverell
PC Zone. It had Charlie Brooker as a staff writer and the best writing of any published gaming magazine. Will Porter, Dave Woods, Rhianna Pratchett, Jamie Sefton, Steve Hogarty etc.

Jim Caris
I'd buy the official mags for the demo discs, but my favourite magazine back then was Future's unofficial PS2 magazine, *PSM2*. To me it felt like a sort of spiritual successor to *Your Sinclair*.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

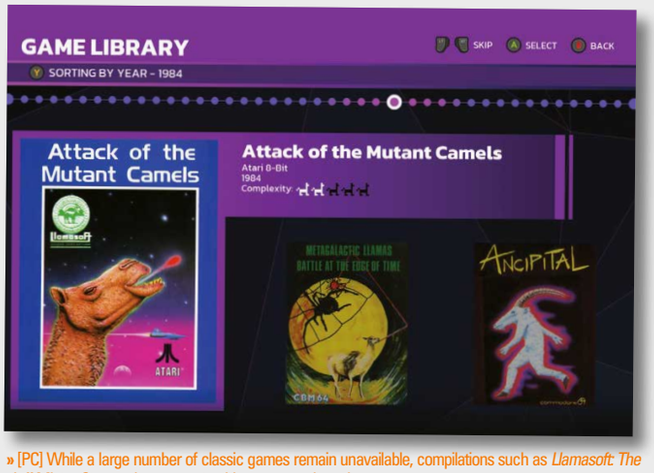
STAR LETTER

RETRO SHMETRO

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I have problems with the word 'retro' as it applies to our hobby. Please hear me out. Retro implies looking back with rose-tinted spectacles. It implies nostalgia. For me and many others, nostalgia can be a part of it, but it's never the reason I play a game for longer than a few minutes. I'm not a collector of retro-gaming hardware, partly because living in a flat in London I just don't have the space, but then I also don't feel it's necessary to appreciate older games – they're pretty much all playable on modern hardware. Don't get me wrong, I'm so glad places like The Retro Collective, Stroud, and Arcade Club (various locations) exist, so that we can see and interact with the original hardware, but for me, to start investing in that hardware myself would be an act of unjustifiable nostalgia.

I get that **Retro Gamer** is a brand at this point. I just wish it was called something like *Classic Gamer*, or even just *Gamer*. By the way, I loved the *Army Of Trolls* pixel-art image from last issue's letters page – it looks like a brutal master level from 2021's *Unpacking*!
Danny Abbasi, London

You're quite right that retro probably isn't the correct word to use within our hobby, but it's one that's evolved from its original meaning to cover our needs. While we don't quite agree with your assessment that all old games are playable on today (illegally, yes, legally, no) we do agree that not everyone can fill their homes with items from the past. We won't be changing the name of the magazine anytime soon, but *Classic Gamer* would certainly be a good option if we did have a brand change. Thanks for sharing your thoughts, it's certainly worth a book in our eyes.



» [PC] While a large number of classic games remain unavailable, compilations such as *Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story* make access to old games much easier.

THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO
Master System
THE MASTER SYSTEM WAS A PIVOTAL CONSOLE FOR SEGA, TRANSLATING ITS ARCADE PROWESS INTO A FOOTHOLD IN THE HOMES OF PLAYERS. THE MACHINE WAS HOME TO PLENTY OF GREAT GAMES OVER THE YEARS – HOW MANY OF THESE HAVE YOU PLAYED?
WORDS BY NICK THORPE
THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO MASTER SYSTEM
WONDER BOY
FANTASY ZONE
CHOPLIFTER
ALEX KIDD IN MISCHIEF WORLD
SECRET COMMAND
ZAXXON

» Nick's love for the Master System could be found in many issues. This is from **RG** 271.

MORE LOVE FOR NICK

Dear **Retro Gamer** staff,
It is with great sadness that I just learnt about Nick Thorpe's passing. I used to be a subscriber to your outstanding magazine until, due to a variety of reasons – lack of budget, lack of time and lack of space – I sadly had to cancel my subscription. I'm now in the middle of reading and archiving some piled up old issues and I've just read Nick's beautiful, nostalgic piece about his first Master System in issue 241.

That piece resonated deeply with me: coming from a low-income family myself and with the Master System being the first console I ever received from my parents, I saw a lot of myself in Nick's memories. Hence I started looking for his contact details to let him know how much those words meant to me, only to learn the sad news. Nick was a talented writer and his passion clearly showed from the pieces he wrote, which were a pleasure to read. If one can ever be devastated by the death of someone they've never met, this is it for me.

Nick – I hope you're in a better place now, a place where you can play all your favourite games endlessly. Rest in peace, brother. All the best,
Nicola

It's been five months since the loss of Nick and we're truly touched by the many readers who continue to write in to pay him tribute. Nick was such a kind, thoughtful person, but he was also humble and would be genuinely amazed about the fact that he's had such an impact on so many people he never got the chance to meet. Thanks for the kind words, Nicola, they really mean a lot to everyone on the mag.

DON'T DO IT, DARRAN

I read Darran's recent article about selling off a lot of his games at the Bournemouth Gaming Market and I'm worried he's getting bored of retro gaming. I used to love looking at all the new pick-ups he shared on social media, but he's been doing that less and less over the last year and seems to be moving across to toys and action figures instead. That's fine obviously, but I'm worried he's getting bored of retro gaming and therefore bored of working on the magazine. I saw he's picked up a few N64 games recently, so hopefully that's given him the bug to get back into games again.
Mike Johnson

Don't worry Mike, Darran isn't going anywhere. He still loves retro gaming, but he's just

CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer,
Future Publishing, Quay House,
The Ambury, Bath,
Somerset, BA1 1UA

Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

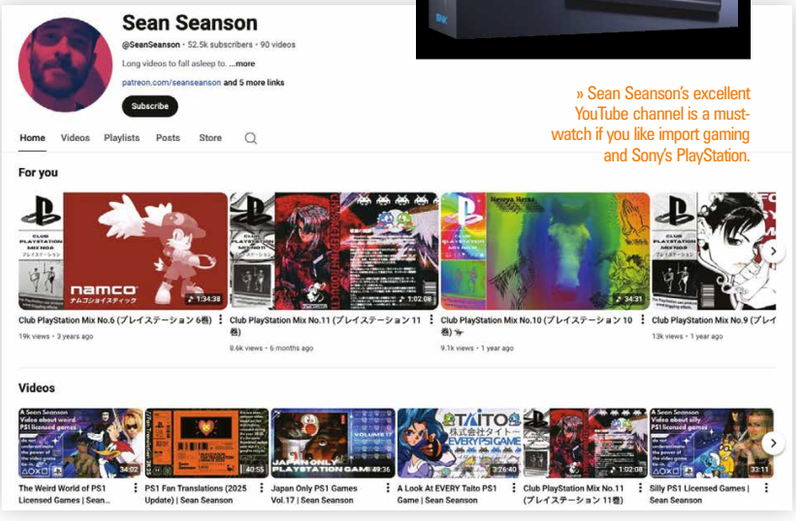
focussing on his action figures at the moment, which doesn't leave a lot of space in his shed for games. The N64 collection isn't going anywhere, so don't be surprised if the odd game shows up alongside a bunch of action figures on his social media feed in the future.

» Darran's collection isn't being entirely gutted. He's a lot more focussed on his N64 collection now.

CATCHING UP

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Recently, I held a **Retro Gamer** backlog reading marathon and finally caught up with all issues from 2025, so now I'm up to date with old games! Your very magazine provided the background music with a C64 SID CD which was a nice supplement from approximately ten years ago. I guess CDs are dead and it's not likely that we'll get something similar soon, but at least the paper format of the mag lives on. These days I'm almost fully digital with games and everything, but it's refreshing to touch physical media sometimes. Speaking of discs, my favourite articles are Covermount Corner and Magazine Craft. I'm a PlayStation freak so I'd be happy to see some coverage (pun intended), because I absolutely adore the ten-year run of *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* and its demos. Also, if I may drop in a few recommendations, the system has some of my favourite niche Japanese games like *Racing Lagoon* (car racing RPG!), *Saiyuki: Journey West* (tactics RPG) and *Tail Concerto* (predecessor of the *Fuga: Melodies Of Steel* games).
Cheers,
Zsolt Muranyi

Thanks for writing in Zsolt, and well done for getting through your backlog! We would like to release more CDs in the future, but they're tricky and costly to pull off. We'll see what we can do, though. Seeing you're a fan of Japanese PlayStation games we'd recommend you check out Sean Seanson on YouTube. He writes for us occasionally and offers great coverage of Japanese games.



» Sean Seanson's excellent YouTube channel is a must-watch if you like import gaming and Sony's PlayStation.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Hardware heaven

There's been plenty of hardware announced recently and it's got Darran and Martyn quite excited. Martyn is super keen on the new handheld Spectrum and C64 that are on the way, while Darran is already planning to collect all the Neo Geo games that PLAION is looking at releasing. The delay of THEA1200 is a bit of a blow, but the included games at least look very good.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Commodore 64 game?

Matthew Hanlon
Have to think about my favourite, but the most important's probably *Creatures 2: Torture Trouble* – the dev diaries in *Commodore Format*, reading those at age 11 were the first time I really thought about making games as something you could do. I've been doing it now for 22 years professionally. Great game too.

Forgotten Worlds
Airborne Ranger was amazing and massively ahead of its time. It plays like a more action-orientated *Metal Gear* game.

Rhys Wynne
Paradroid is my favourite C64 game. A feeling of desolation, and so deep with a great gameplay loop. An all-time classic.

Crazy Burger
Creatures. Outstanding graphics, music and tons of charm.

Graeme Norgate
Boulder Dash and its sequel *Boulder Dash II*. It may have been an Atari 8-bit game first, but I spent weeks playing them on the C64. I still go back to them today.

Joeleole
Karateka: lots of great memories playing it with my friends. I loved the challenge of fighting all the way to the end. It felt like a real accomplishment to survive the gauntlet.

Alcade
It's hard to choose just one, but *Turrican II* is the game I'll always go back to, and one of the few I could actually complete.

Piotr Gaszewski
Microsoft Soccer from the classic era. *Sam's Journey* from the modern one.

Exinferi
Gyruss, because it is the very first game I ever beat. The adrenaline rush as you near the end hooked me on videogames for life.

Richard Browne
It will always be *Paradroid*. Even today it stands up. Simply an amazing game.

» [C64] There's still plenty of love for Graftgold's *Paradroid*, which makes sense as it's superb.

retro GAMER

Future Publishing Ltd Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA | **Email:** retrogamer@futurenet.com

EDITORIAL

Editor | **Darran 'Bubble Bobble' Jones**
darran.jones@futurenet.com
Art Editor | **Andy 'Bubble Bobble' Salter**
Features Editor | **Martyn 'IK+' Carroll**
Production Editor | **Tim 'Kikstart 2' Empey**
Group Art Director | **Woz 'IK+' Brown**
Editorial Director | **Tony 'Mercenary' Mott**

CONTRIBUTORS

Writing Steve Boxer, Andrew Fisher, Richard C Hewison, Faith Johnson, Paul Kautz, James Konik, Iain Lee, Shaun McClure, Mike Mika, Rory Milne, Paul Rose, Abbie Stone, James Tocchio

Design | Ryan Robbins

PRODUCTION

Head of Production | **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager | **Clare Scott**
Advertising Production Manager | **Joanne Crosby**
Advertising Production Coordinator | **Emma Thomas**
Digital Editions Controller | **Jason Hudson**
Production Controller | **Vivienne Calvert**

ADVERTISING

Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director | **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Account Director | **Kevin Stoddart**
kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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Subscription enquiries | **www.mymagazine.co.uk/FAQ**
Online orders | **magazinesdirect.com**
Consumer Revenues Director | **Sharon Todd**

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CIRCULATION

Circulation Manager | **Brooke Butler**

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Head of Print Licensing | **Rachel Shaw**

MANAGEMENT

Managing Director, Games and Ents | **Matthew Pierce**
Global Art Director | **Rodney Dive**
SVP, Tech & Games | **Simon Collis**

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ARK

Batman: Arkham Asylum

YOU'D BE BATS TO MISS IT

» RETROREVIVAL

» XBOX 360 » 2009
» ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS

I remember our games magazines absolutely losing their collective minds when *Batman: Arkham Asylum* was originally released. I know very little of Batman's lore outside of the movies and never watched the various cartoons or read the numerous comics, so I had no idea that having Paul Dini on board as a writer was a huge deal or that having the voices of Kevin Conroy, Mark Hamill and Arleen Sorkin (as Batman, the Joker and Harley Quinn respectively) was also a reason for celebration.

Sometimes there's so much hype for a game and so many of your peers are raving about it that you're put off playing it and that was definitely the case with *Arkham Asylum*. I'm pretty sure that by the time I did get to play it the Game Of The Year edition was out so that's the version I went for.

As it turns out, *Arkham Asylum* does indeed deserve the many accolades that it received, and while elements of it aren't perfect, there's one aspect of it that I absolutely love. *Arkham Asylum* is a Metroidvania and it's a very good one at that, with a brilliantly designed main location and plenty of secrets hidden away in it. It's also exceptionally well-acted for a game of this type, with Mark Hamill in particular delivering a spectacular performance as the Joker, just as he did in *Batman: Mask Of The Phantasm* (the only animated Batman film I have ever seen).

I recently revisited the game on my Steam Deck and I had just as much fun with it, more so because it runs at a solid 60fps and feels really fluid to play as a result. Having said that, some aspects of the game certainly haven't aged well. Being chased through the sewers by Killer Croc remains extremely tedious and that final showdown is a real letdown too. And yet the game's slick combat, expertly designed asylum and neat attention to detail (Batman gets stubble as time progresses) shows that Warner Bros was right to task such a relatively unknown studio with such a massive IP. Damn, now I really want to play *Arkham City*. ✱

ENDGAME

SUPERMAN (1988, ARCADE)

» In Taito's Superman arcade beat-'em-up, The Man Of Steel must protect Earth from an evil emperor and his army of alien invaders. Sounds like a serious challenge, so it's a good job our hero has a red-suited stranger to help deliver double damage

01

» At the end of the final stage, genuine blue Supes boots the emperor while reproduction red Supes smacks some oversized cronies. However, the emperor is not Brainiac. Instead, he's a new baddie named Zaas.

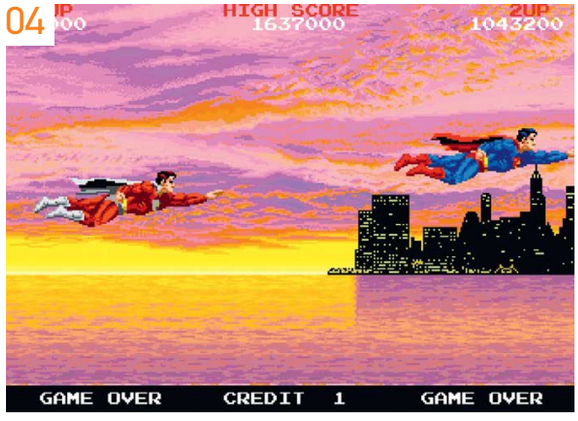
02

» With Emperor Zaas finally defeated, we cut to Earth where a beautiful new day is beginning. Suddenly, there's a blinding flash and we see a far away explosion. That's the emperor's space ship, blinking out of existence.

03

» Thankfully, our Supermen managed to escape the fiery blast in the nick of time and return to Earth. Here they are, cruising into New York Bay, observing America's unwavering symbol of freedom and international friendship.

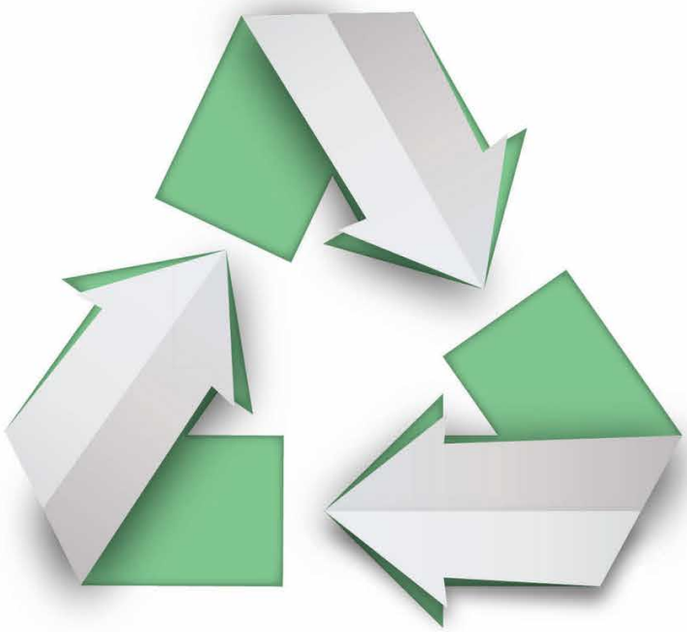
04



» As the sun rises and the city slides into view, Superman looks ahead, contemplating the future. He thinks, "When will I be called on next to save civilisation? What deadly superpowers are waiting in the wings? Who is this guy in the red suit behind me?"

05

» We return to the silent peace of space, no screams. Echoing the ending of the Christopher Reeve *Superman* movies, we see the Sun emerge from behind the Earth. This world has survived thanks to the actions of a man from another. This is the end... for now.



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